Through the Looking Glass

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/31970626.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Hannibal Lecter & Mischa Lecter, Will Graham & Mischa Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Mischa Lecter, Will Graham, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford
Additional Tags:	Hannibal season 1 AU, Hannibal Lecter is not the Chesapeake Ripper, Mischa Lecter is a Ghost, Will Graham is a Medium, Alternate Meeting, Eventual Smut, Romance, Hurt/Comfort, Dark Comedy, WARNING: Get Your Tissues, No Major Character Death, Sassy Will Graham, Sassy Mischa Lecter, Everyone is Sassy with Hannibal, but he loves it, Oral Sex, Frottage, they switch, Badass Mischa
Language:	English
Collections:	Mass_Interest
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-15 Completed: 2021-06-24 Words: 55,721 Chapters: 11/11

Through the Looking Glass

by Shotgun_sinner

Summary

Hannibal Lecter's sister died tragically when he was just a boy, but she never moved on. Her ghost has stayed with him throughout his life, giving him a reason to stay a good man. An honest man. The only problem is, no one can see her or hear her aside from him.

He's been alone for thirty years since her death, as it's difficult to maintain a relationship when he sometimes speaks to someone who they can't see or hear.

All of that changes when he meets Will Graham, a profiler for the FBI who just happens to be a medium.

Notes

OKAY SO I know I said I was going on a hiatus. I swear, that was the intention. I think the moment I posted the last chapter of 'Golden Promises' I was smacked in the face with this plot bunny that WOULD NOT leave me alone.

This is the weirdest thing I've ever written, but I am UNBELIEVABLY proud of it. It's COMPLETE, just needs some adjustments and tweaks here and there. Unlike all my other stories, there's SOME smut, but it's not the storyline. They're going to do the do, but not every chapter like I've done in previous stories.

I hope you give this a whirl. There's about 50K words total, and I'll be posting frequently, just as soon as I edit the chapters. Thank you guys! <3

ALSO, my muse for Mischa is Dani Clayton from The Haunting of Bly Manor. She's my head canon Mischa, as I love her dearly.

Chapter 1

“I just feel like no one understands me,” Franklyn sobbed. Hannibal shifted uncomfortably while watching a bubble of snot pop from his left nostril, and he grimaced while handing over the box of tissues. Franklyn took the box gratefully, fluffing one tissue out before blowing his nose wetly.

Hannibal watched with dismay as he placed his soaked tissue on his glass side table. “No one but you, that is,” Franklyn continued, still sniffling.

‘Has it been an hour yet?’ Mischa asked. ‘I can’t with him anymore, Han.’

Hannibal’s eyes flicked to her briefly, watching her float behind Franklyn’s chair as though she were pacing. “All anyone wants in life is to feel seen,” he told his despondent patient. “To be understood. Seeking connection is a primary motivator in life. Tobias may not have understood you, but there is someone out there that will. It’s better that things ended rather than dragging them out, isn’t it?”

Franklyn sniffled, yanking another tissue from the box to dab at his eyes. “I guess,” he conceded.

“In the aftermath of your breakup, you recall your relationship with a rose tint,” Hannibal continued. “Do you recall how unhappy he made you? Do you remember how often we spoke of his heartlessness and disinterest?”

“I do, but… he always made me coffee in the mornings,” Franklyn’s voice grew near-hysterical, and Hannibal winced. “*Always*! Just… so thoughtful. He’d call me every day at lunchtime. He’ll never call, now,” he cried. “He’s… not in love with me, and now I have to make my own coffee!”

‘Jeez-a-loo,’ Mischa said miserably, flicking her long hair over her shoulder.

“Franklyn,” Hannibal sighed. “Now is the time to take charge of your life. Use this experience to your advantage. You’ve wanted a new career, a new apartment. Use this as a time to decide what you want, as you’ve been freed from the shackles of a failed relationship. A time for new beginnings,” he encouraged.

Franklyn blinked at him, biting his lip hesitantly. “That’s true,” he said slowly, hiccupping through his fading dry sobs. “Maybe you could come for dinner? I could… make something you’d like. Or we could go to dinner. You know. Together.”

Mischa laughed so loudly he could barely hear him, and he flicked his eyes at her disapprovingly. ‘Sorry,’ she said, covering her mouth with her fingers to cover her continued giggling.

“I am your therapist,” Hannibal said slowly and carefully. “It would be very unethical indeed if I were to do such a thing. We are not friends, Franklyn. We cannot become friends, either.”

The long, shrill, wail that poured from Franklyn's mouth in response was like nails on a blackboard.

Mischa glared at him, crossing her arms behind his chair. 'If I had arms, I'd have strangled him by now.'

"You say that because you don't like me," Franklyn wailed. "No one likes me!"

Hannibal sighed, rolling the mounting tension from his shoulders. "You dwell too much on how others perceive you," he said soothingly. "There are those who do not like me, Franklyn. I do not concern myself with any of it. If you spend your life worrying over what others perceive you to be, you'll never live a day of your life. Your homework for this week is to come up with ways to fill your time. Things that you'd love to do. I want a list for next week, and we can discuss your progress then."

"What if all I write is that I want you?" Franklyn said hopefully.

Mischa giggled, and Hannibal ignored her. "I would say that you should set your sights on something attainable. That's our hour, Franklyn."

Franklyn huffed, standing from the leather chair in a snit. He straightened out his blazer, turning to Hannibal with pursed lips. "Till next week, Hannibal."

"Doctor Lecter," he corrected through gritted teeth.

Franklyn blushed, then left through the patient exit.

'I can't listen to patients anymore, Han,' she sighed. Hannibal glanced at her before pouring himself a few fingers of scotch. 'I told you when you switched from medical to psychiatry that it was a terrible idea, but no. You don't listen to me because…'

"Because you are a ghost," Hannibal replied after a sip of scotch. "And I am living the life that I want to live."

'But do you have to do such *boring* things?' she said emphatically while gliding across the room to the windows. 'There's a whole world out there that I haven't seen!'

"You've seen Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Portugal, Great Britain, Denmark," Hannibal listed patiently. "I've taken you around the world, Mischa. I have to settle down sometimes."

She glided back across the room, and Hannibal felt the chill of her presence against his face. 'Are you taking Alana out tonight?'

He nodded, and she rolled her eyes at him. "We're going to dinner at seven. If you don't like it, then you can… go to the middle place."

The Middle Place was what they'd taken to calling the plane of existence she could snap to when she wasn't with Hannibal. She couldn't venture far from him physically. At least, as physically as her spirit form seemed to be. The furthest she ever got was a few blocks away

before each step he took tugged her back in his direction. She could, however, go to the Middle Place. It was a world between this one and the next. It took her from his company on occasion, and as he'd gotten older, she'd spent some time there, both willingly and unwillingly.

For some reason or another, she had been tethered to him since she died thirty years ago.

'You act like I'm in the way!' she said miserably. 'I don't take up space. I don't… cost anything! And I don't understand what the hell you're doing with her. She's *boring*, Hannibal.'

He sipped his scotch ruefully. Dating was hard enough, never mind adding the conflict of a difficult to please sister who happened to be dead. "You'd have liked her well enough if… well," he shrugged.

'If I was alive?' she asked dolefully.

"If you could speak with her," Hannibal amended.

No one saw her but him. When he was young, he went to numerous mediums and psychics that claimed they could converse with the dead, but no one he ever saw acknowledged her presence. There was a brief time where he was certain he was mad. That losing her had tossed him off the deep end.

Thirty years later, she was still with him.

She did not interact with the physical world, aside from the very recent revelation she'd made that she could conjure enough energy to move an object. She could do it briefly, on occasion. The intense energy it took for her to move something or break something usually shipped her off to the Middle Place for a few days until she could return to his plane of existence. Despite how long she'd been this way, she'd only learned to do it within the last six years or so.

Initially, she broke things when she felt angry or helpless with her situation. Eventually she was able to move things even if she wasn't angry, but… it took a lot out of her.

She'd broken many, many, teacups in their time together.

He watched her braid her long hair over her shoulder, wide blue eyes lifted towards the windows. The sun filtered right through her, like she was made of dust particles. She hadn't stayed six this whole time. As he'd grown, so did she. It was like having her in his life, even if she did not live.

No matter how lonely he felt sometimes, he was always grateful that he got to keep her. Even if it was like this.

"We can stay in, if you prefer," he offered, guilt worming in at the thought of dragging her along on a date in which she did not want to attend.

'Does she make you happy?' Mischa asked, flickering in and out of existence like a shadow.

“I… suppose. In a way, yes,” he said uncertainly.

‘Then let’s go home. You can’t go on a date dressed like a stiff,’ she snorted.

He touched his blazer with a frown, adjusting his tie discreetly. Perhaps he would change before he met Alana for dinner.

‘Boring,’ Mischa declared, gliding back and forth by their table at the restaurant. He’d taken Alana to a very exclusive place, and their table was a cozy one towards the back of the restaurant. She looked lovely in a royal blue dress, complimenting her dark hair and pale skin perfectly.

“So I told Jack that if he wanted me to consult, it was a bad idea. I mean, I’ve been… well, not friends necessarily, but… I guess friends is the word? Either way, I know him. So, it puts me in a weird place, because I don’t like to have sessions with people I know, you know? I-”

‘Boring, boring, boring,’ Mischa chanted, glancing over to the table next to them. There was a young man there with his girlfriend, and she whistled. ‘Wow. If I were alive, he’d be in trouble.’

He was trying to pay attention to Alana. Really. He was. Mischa was beyond distracting, however, and he scowled while watching his sister primp herself for a man that could not see her. ‘Look at his jawline!’ she exclaimed. She glanced down at his plate, glancing between the man and his lover with a scowl. ‘Ugh. Never mind. He’s *vegan*.’

Hannibal snorted, and Alana paused in her tirade to grimace at him. “Is something about it funny to you?”

He blinked, turning back to her with a frown. “I’m… I’m sorry, Alana. No. You were saying?”

“I was saying,” she began.

‘Something boring about work,’ Mischa interjected.

“Jack asked me to assess Will, and I said no.”

“Who is Will?” he asked, though the look on her face showed that he should definitely know that. He hadn’t heard her, though.

“Will Graham,” she sighed. “Are you… is something wrong? You’re not with me tonight.”

Usually, Mischa went to the Middle Place when he was on dates. It seemed tonight she was in the mood to haunt him. “Forgive me,” he cleared his throat, keeping his eyes firmly on Alana and not on Mischa, who was now hovering between them with the table cutting through her thighs. “I have a patient that… expressed romantic interest in me. It’s distracting me because I fear I will need to refer him to someone else.”

“Refer him to me,” Alana offered brightly, smiling while sipping her wine. “And as a favor, you could do the assessment on Will Graham?”

That sounded far too perfect, even though he really hadn’t heard a word she said about the man. He nodded while raising his glass to her. “Deal.”

“Great!” she laughed. “God, I have to warn you, though. Will is… he’s great. He’s a nice guy. Quiet. But…”

‘Oh man, he’s weirdo,’ Mischa laughed, hovering out from the table to allow a waiter to pass through her with a tray. The man stopped, turning slightly as though he felt something. It happened on occasion, but nothing ever came of it. He continued on his way, a shiver rolling through him. ‘Han! He felt me I think?’

“He’s a… well,” Alana struggled to finish the thought, and he and Mischa waited patiently. “He’s a medium. Of a sort.”

Hannibal didn’t contain his snort this time, and Mischa agreed. ‘Bullshit,’ she laughed.

“No one can converse with the dead,” Hannibal said skeptically, eyeing his sister who was now dancing by the violinist who was playing by the fireplace.

“He can,” she continued. “You’d need to see it to believe it. It’s… crazy. He solves cases like you wouldn’t believe. Goes to a scene, and boom. Walks us right through what happened like he was there for it.”

“An empathy disorder would work similarly,” Hannibal said reasonably.

“I thought that, too,” she sighed. “Until one day, he comes up to me and just…” she shivered. “He told me that my grandmother knows. He said, ‘don’t worry, your grandmother knows,’ right out of the blue. I… I burst into tears, Hannibal. I had never told anyone about… about that.”

“About what, exactly?” he pressed.

“The day she died,” Alana began, swallowing thickly. “She was having seizures. I was just a girl, barely thirteen. My mother told me to tell her that I loved her, because she was dying, and… and my throat was clogged with tears. I couldn’t get the words out. Before I could tell her, she had another convulsion and she died. I never got to tell her I loved her, and he just… he just told me that she knows.”

It all sounded very dubious, but Hannibal agreed it was oddly on the nose. “Interesting,” he decided to say.

“Yeah,” she sniffled, swallowing a sip of wine to hide her tears.

Mischa drifted back over from the table across from them. ‘That guy refused bread because yeast had to die in order for them to make it,’ she snorted. ‘*Yeast*, Hannibal.’

She clearly hadn't heard Alana's story, and perhaps that was for the best. Every time he made an appointment with a medium that was dubbed the best, they were always proven to be hoaxes. They'd talk about his grandmother whom he'd never met. Or his father, who'd never cared that he existed in the first place. They never seemed to notice Mischa, who was sometimes quiet literally in their lap, screaming in their face.

She always left those places with him feeling… miserable. It was better not to get her hopes up for this… Will Graham.

The rest of their dinner went by without preamble. Once they were in the car, Alana turned to him with a little grin. "Maybe… we go back to your house for the night?"

'Gag me,' Mischa sighed. 'Game of Thrones is on tonight,' she whined from the backseat.

"I'm amenable to that," he agreed, leaning in for a kiss. Alana met him halfway, and Mischa made exaggerated squelching noises from the backseat.

He was very, very, good at ignoring her when she was like this, which wasn't often. Every once in a while, her… for lack of a better word, *life* made her feel trapped. If being obnoxious helped her through her situation, Hannibal would allow it.

Not that he had a choice, really. Not that he ever preferred her absence.

Having her with him, squelching noises and all, was better than not having her.

Alana pressed herself against him once back at his house, and he pulled away. "Forgive me," he said softly. "I like having the television on for… background noise."

Alana raised an eyebrow but allowed him to head off to his living room to turn on the television.

'Channel 60,' she said, folding to the floor in an elegant heap.

Game of Thrones would start in ten minutes, which occupied her mind and her interest, even if Hannibal couldn't understand it. "Please give me some privacy," he pleaded softly.

'Obviously,' she shivered, eyes glued to the television. 'Not anything I want to see, brother-mine.'

He smiled, returning to Alana who was taking in the artwork on his walls. "Game of Thrones?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"It… soothes me," Hannibal grimaced. "Shall we?" he asked, gesturing toward the staircase.

"I mean," she shrugged, stepping into his space. "We could… in the living room?"

'Oh *God* no,' Mischa wailed.

"I like Game of Thrones," Alana said coyly.

“No,” Hannibal said, clearing his throat. “I… er… prefer a bed.”

She sighed, leaning in for a kiss that Hannibal honestly wasn’t quite in the mood for, anymore. “Then let’s watch it together,” she shrugged. “Who am I to get in the way of your little pleasures?”

‘Can you *not*?’ Mischa groaned.

“Perhaps,” Hannibal offered with a sigh, “we could do this another night? I fear I’m… not in the right place, tonight.”

Her face fell, but she nodded. “Whatever you want, obviously.”

She called a cab for herself, refusing a drive home that Hannibal would have given her even if it made Mischa glare daggers at him. “Look,” Alana sighed. “We tried, right? I mean, we can still be friends?”

“Alana, I-”

“It’s okay,” she said with a reassuring smile. “I know you don’t… date. I knew that even when we started doing this. You’re a quiet man who likes his space, and there’s nothing wrong with that. No hard feelings, okay?”

“No hard feelings,” he agreed numbly.

She smiled again before there was a beep from the cab outside. “I’ll call you tomorrow with Will Graham’s contact information. As long as you don’t mind assessing him for me?”

“I don’t mind,” he promised.

She nodded, biting her lip while hovering by the door. “Thank you for tonight,” she said softly. “Goodnight, Hannibal.”

“Goodnight, Alana.”

She closed the door, and he watched her descend his porch steps with a sense of icy dread settling over him.

He was tired of being alone. He was tired of not having anyone he could touch or feel in his life. He had his sister, but no one else. It didn’t seem that he would ever have anyone else. How could he?

With Mischa absorbed in her show, he crept upstairs to get ready for bed. After brushing his teeth and putting on pajamas, he went into the kitchen to get himself a glass of water before bed. The show came to an end, and he went into the living room to shut off the tv.

Mischa breezed past, stretching as though she were tired. ‘I think I ship Jaime and Brienne?’ she said with a laugh. ‘They’re the least likely couple of all time, but… they’re so cute together.’

“I’m sure I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he sighed, sipping his water distractedly.

‘She didn’t need to leave,’ Mischa said after a beat. ‘Hannibal, I don’t want you to be… alone.’

“I’m never alone, dearest,” he said, giving her a gentle smile. “I have you, do I not?”

‘A real person,’ she sighed, twisting her long hair over her shoulder. ‘She was boring, but… *you* can be, too.’

“Thank you for that,” he laughed.

‘You want to read to me a little bit before bed?’ she asked hopefully.

“Of course,” he said, putting his glass in the sink. “What book tonight?”

‘A Feast for Crows?’ she grinned.

“You’re obsessed,” he chuckled. “I am canceling HBO.”

‘You are not,’ she grinned, floating up the stairs behind him. ‘It’s the one thing I love. Well, aside from you, anyway.’

He smiled while taking the thick, stupid, book from his bookcase, settling into his bed with a sigh. Mischa hovered in the room while he read it to her, humming to herself.

At some point, he drifted off. Mischa’s little sigh made him smile as he fell asleep. ‘Right at a good part, too.’

Mischa absconded to the Middle Place the next day, completely uninterested in sitting through his appointments. He checked his messages during his lunch break, finding an email from Alana.

‘Hannibal,

I’ve sent you the contact information for Will Graham below. I’ve also spoken with him, so he’s expecting your call. He needs an evaluation before he can return to field work, so there is some urgency involved. I really appreciate you doing this for me.

The offer still stands for your patient, as well. Speak with him and see if he’d like to meet me, and you can give him my contact information to set up an appointment. I will make room for him, promise.

Thank you again.

-Alana’

Completely sterile of any sentiment. He sighed, placing his tablet down on the desk to jot down Will Graham's number.

He had some free time before his next appointment, so he called the cell phone number he'd been given.

"Graham," a deep voice greeted briskly.

"Yes, hello," he said politely. "This is Doctor Hannibal Lecter. I was given your contact information by Alana Bloom."

"Oh," he said distractedly, and he heard dogs barking. "Yeah. Uh, well. There was an incident while I was working a scene, and Jack Crawford feels I need… an *evaluation* before I can return to field work."

It was said like a cussword, and Hannibal bit back a laugh. "I have not been filled in on details," he admitted. "However, I am free tonight at seven-thirty if you'd like to come to my office?"

"Tonight?" he asked in surprise. "That… that would be perfect. Yeah. Anything to get back in the field sooner. Thank you."

"It's no problem at all," he assured the man. "I will text you my office address. I would like to inform you that should you be unable to make it for any reason, I do have a twenty-four-hour cancellation policy."

"Of course you do," he laughed and Hannibal bristled. "See you at seven-thirty, doctor."

"Take care," he said politely before ending the call. He shot out a quick text with his work address, and received a thumbs up emoji for his trouble.

The rest of his day passed in reasonable quiet aside from a few patients that tended to be headaches. He felt tired by the time seven-thirty rolled around, as he'd fallen asleep late because he'd read to Mischa for hours.

He sipped a cup of tea before going to the door, swinging it open at seven-thirty on the dot.

The man that greeted him there was not what he expected.

His initial eye sweep yielded a disheveled man in wrinkled pants and a Henley stained with what looked like oil. His chocolate curls were shiny, but wildly chaotic. The man looked up when Hannibal opened the door, and his face was so unexpected he had to physically refrain from sucking in a breath. With fingers twitching for a charcoal, he took in the strong curve of his jawline, the flawless expanse of his throat. Rose pink lips parted as his new patient took him in as well, eyes the color of the ocean during a storm regarding him with surprise.

"Will Graham?" he asked, stepping out to shake his patient's hand. "Doctor Hannibal Lecter," he greeted. "Nice to meet you."

"Yeah," Will sighed, dropping his eyes back down to Hannibal's sternum. "Likewise."

“Please,” he gestured towards the open door with his hand. “Come in. Make yourself comfortable.”

As Will drifted past him, he scented the distinctly unpleasant aftershave he was wearing. Beneath that, there was dogs, pine trees, the mint of his shampoo, and motor oil that explained the stain on his blue Henley.

He did not sit down right away. Instead, he paced the office, taking the space in with wide eyes that drifted over every chair in the room. “Do you do this on purpose?” he asked.

Hannibal blinked at him. “Forgive me, but to what are you referring?”

“The chairs,” Will elaborated, glancing at him with a raised eyebrow. “There are… six different places that I could potentially sit. Does where I decide to park my ass say something about me?”

He tried not to laugh. Really, he did. His new patient was startlingly perceptive. “Should a new patient decide to sit at the Tiffany Blue sofa there,” he said, pointing towards the couch on the far wall. “I can infer that they like their space, so I do my best to give that to them during their sessions. Should they sit on that wooden chair there,” he gestured toward the one by the door. “I understand they do not wish to make being in therapy official, yet. Should they sit on the chaise like a seat, I know they prefer keeping the windows away from their sightline. A general sign of depression,” he explained at the confusion on Will’s face.

“If they lay on the chaise, I know they’ve never attended a therapy session before and think that because people do it in movies and films that they’re required to do so, here. Should they pick either of the leather chairs, I know they want their session to be more of a conversation rather than therapy. If they sit at my desk, they’re invasive.”

“Sounds like I should pull one of the leather chairs to the door then,” he chuckled.

“You may sit wherever you want, and I promise not to pick apart why you chose to sit there,” Hannibal grinned. What an unusual man.

“What if I chose to stand around through the session?” he asked glancing up into Hannibal’s eyes for a split second. The depth of intelligence in them astounded him, as did the man’s beauty.

“What would you infer from someone who refused to sit through a session, I wonder?” he chose to ask instead.

Will tipped his head, hands on his hips while considering it. “I’d say the patient has difficulty in new places. Doesn’t like therapy and wants to be done with his session the moment it begins. Maybe because therapy has never worked on him. Maybe he chooses to stand because he likes to read, and the books above him were calling to him.”

“He’d be more than welcome to peruse the balcony, should he want to do so,” Hannibal chuckled. He gestured to the ladder. “You can wander wherever you’d like, and you can sit wherever you’d like.”

Will hesitated for half a second before ascending the ladder, immediately perusing his bookshelves with interest. “May I inquire about why you were referred to me, Will?”

“How much do you know about me?” he asked, glancing over the railing as Hannibal trailed the far wall so he wouldn’t have to crick his neck to look up at his new patient.

“Next to nothing at all,” he admitted.

“Next to,” Will mused with a dry laugh. “But not nothing. What have you been told?”

He decided to be truthful. Alana was not his psychiatrist, so therefore there was no breach of ethics regarding a conversation about him. “Alana informed me that you are a medium, of a sort.”

Will snorted, eyes glued to the books on his shelves as he walked along them. “That’s always the thing that gets mentioned first,” he sighed. “What else?”

“That’s all,” Hannibal admitted.

“Wow,” Will laughed. “How many languages do you speak?”

The question threw him. “Seven,” Hannibal said, smiling when it resulted in the shocked expression on Will’s face. “Five fluently, however.”

“I teach Criminal Psychology at Quantico,” Will said, quid pro quo. “Sometimes Jack Crawford asks me to consult on difficult cases, although he’s been asking me more and more. Why do you have so many medical anatomy books?”

Tit for tat, then. “I was a surgeon for a few years, but… it was not my calling,” he replied truthfully. Well, as truthfully as he could, anyway. It was very difficult to focus when Mischa was gliding around the operating room, humming to herself. “You consult on cases. Do you profile the killers?”

“Sometimes,” he shrugged, taking a book out that caught his interest before tucking it back into the case carefully. “Mostly I show up and read the scene.”

“As a medium?” Hannibal asked.

“No,” Will laughed. “I know people think I’m conversing with the dead at scenes, but they hardly ever linger where they’ve been brutally murdered. I can’t explain what I do, I guess. I take the perspective of the killer and sort out his or her motivation behind their every action. People behave predictably, you just need to know people well enough and everything they do has an explanation. It’s as simple as that.”

It sounded very specifically like an empathy disorder, and he smiled to himself at being right the night before. “It’s quite a gift,” Hannibal assured him because it truly was. “What can you infer about me, I wonder?”

Will smiled ruefully, glancing up at him with a raised eyebrow. He turned from the bookcase, taking in the grand space with his elbows resting on the railing. “You are meticulous,” he

said, sharp eyes taking in the room, then gliding over Hannibal with interest. “You were born somewhere that… that isn’t quite as modern as the rest of the world. You’re important there, though you don’t acknowledge it. Raised upper class, taught about the finer things in life. You’re well-traveled, and you have a great appreciation for architecture and fine art. The way you dress implies that you’re strict and unforgiving, but… I don’t think that’s true. It’s armor. Like a knight going off to battle.”

“Quite astute of you,” Hannibal said in surprise. Nothing he said was shocking, however.

“You’ve kept every human anatomy book from your residency and medical school,” Will noted clinically. “Whatever made you decide to give that up, it wasn’t because surgery wasn’t your calling. You loved it, but you loved something else more. I don’t think it was psychiatry.”

Well. Hannibal blinked at him, and he realized that the invasive man was reading his every facial expression. He struggled to smooth his face out, turning away from Will to end this. “Quite a gift you have,” he decided. “Can you tell me about the incident that sent you to me?”

Will sighed, leaning away from the railing before coming down the ladder. He paced the space, rubbing his fingers against the fine stubble covering his remarkable jawline. “I told you that they don’t *always* linger around where they’ve been murdered, but sometimes they do,” he said softly. “The scene was a serial killer. You might’ve heard about him, The Baltimore Strangler?”

Hannibal nodded. The man was gruesome. He raped and strangled his victims for hours before they eventually died. If Mischa hadn’t stayed with him after her death, he would be exactly the kind of man that earned Hannibal’s brand of justice. He never became that man, though. “I’ve heard of the cases,” he admitted.

“The victim… she was there,” he blurted, scrubbing his fingers across his face. “I can’t… I can’t *see* her, obviously. I can hear her, though. She was… God, she was so upset. If they linger here after they’ve died, it’s only for a few hours at most before whatever calls them over makes them leave this plane. I tried to get her to describe him, but… she couldn’t. I felt every ounce of pain that she felt, and it was… it was *horrible*, Doctor Lecter. All she wanted from me was to tell her parents that she loved them, and that she was sorry she dropped out of college without telling them. She wanted me to tell her boyfriend that she would have married him, just that he asked too soon. She wanted me to tell her brother that he deserved better than to work at a dead-end job because he was too smart to spend his life working a job he hated. Through all of it, she just… sobbed. It was horrible. I was so busy listening to her that I didn’t hear anyone else around me, and Jack… he thinks I’ve gone off the deep end. He’s never believed I have this… ability. No one ever does,” he sighed.

The story sounded utterly fantastic, but… Hannibal could agree that it was horrible. “Did you tell her loved ones what she said to you?”

It clearly was not a question that Will expected. He flinched, then nodded, pacing the office with his hands on his hips. “Even when I was right about every single thing she told me, Jack still thought I was… well, nuts. He doesn’t like to think that there are things in the world that

bar explanation. For him, everything is black and white. He thinks my ability to put together scenes just goes too far sometimes. That I get lost in the violence of it and read it as though it's happening to me. Empathizing with the victim, I guess. How can I not when the victim is screaming at me?"

"I imagine very few understand what that's like," Hannibal agreed. He suffered the same difficulty with Mischa day in and day out. As he'd grown older, he was better capable of tuning her out. When he was young, he didn't understand that acknowledging her presence when there were others around made him look unstable. His aunt and uncle had sent him to therapists for years before he realized that if he just stopped talking to Mischa in front of people, they'd stop looking at him like he was insane.

"No one understands what it's like," Will amended. "I guess you're not signing off on me."

Hannibal looked up at him with a regretful expression. "I think I'd like to meet with you another time," he admitted.

Will's face crumpled, but he nodded. "Are there white padded rooms in my future, doctor?"

"No," he chuckled. "I don't think that's necessary."

"Well at least that," Will laughed humorlessly.

"Shall we say next week, same time?"

Will nodded, shoulders slumping. "Yeah," he agreed. "Fine."

Hannibal showed Will the exit door just as Mischa manifested by his desk. Will was out in the corridor when she spoke. 'Are you still at work? God, when do you relax?' she asked, sighing like a martyr.

Will whipped around the moment she spoke, looking at Hannibal with wide eyes.

He'd heard her. Hannibal's mouth fell open, his chest rising and falling with his gasping breaths. Will's eyes were impossibly wide, his head cocked as though he were listening for something that Hannibal shouldn't be able to hear.

'What is it?' she asked, gliding over to Hannibal's side. He pointedly ignored her, watching Will swallow thickly. 'Oh wow. He's kind of cute in a scruffy way, isn't he? Look at that jawline!'

Will smiled, eyes drifting shyly towards the floor. "Is everything alright, Will?" he asked, doing his best to keep his voice even.

"Yeah," he said, forcing himself to nod. "Uh. Fine. Sorry. Next week," he said.

"Next week," Hannibal said numbly. "Goodnight, Will."

He closed the door, pressing himself against it in shock. Mischa watched him curiously, gliding off towards his desk again. 'New patient?'

“Yes,” he admitted. “One that I would like you to be present for next week.”

‘Why?’ she asked curiously.

“He’s interesting,” Hannibal said softly.

‘And *pretty*,’ she pointed out with a smile. ‘Oh boy. Not a good idea with a patient, Han.’

“Indeed,” he sighed, closing his eyes to gather himself for a moment. He’d heard her. *He heard her*.

Will Graham was in fact a medium, and he could hear Mischa.

Chapter 2

He kept himself busy for the following week, but he was distracted. There was some regret on his part for not dragging the man back into his office to ascertain just how much he could hear, or if he could see her.

This was for the best, though. It gave him time to think. He could gather his thoughts and consider just what this meant for him, exactly.

Will Graham had intrigued him even before he knew he could hear his sister. He was quite obviously beautiful, and there was a fierce intelligence in him that called to Hannibal intimately.

The only thing that would have prevented him from seeking out a tentative friendship with the man was his sister, who sometimes made it difficult to have living people in his life. She would not be a problem for Will. He could speak to his sister because Will could hear her, too.

By the time his appointment rolled around, he was nervous. "Mischa," he said softly, just before their appointment. "I'd like to ask that you stay silent until quarter of," he asked politely.

'That's a weird request,' she laughed. 'Why the specific time?'

"Give me time to assess him," he pleaded. "Please. I never ask anything of you."

She shrugged, gliding off toward the windows. 'Sure. I will… uh, stay *quiet*,' she agreed in a teasing whisper.

He welcomed Will into the office again, grinning as the stubborn man immediately sat down in his office chair at his desk. He raised his eyebrows as though begging Hannibal to pick him apart for it, but he let the seating choice slide. "How was your week?" he asked.

Will smiled ruefully, twirling the chair to follow Hannibal's movement in the room. "Fine," he shrugged. He shivered as Mischa glided right up to him, taking in his face a bare foot from his own. He could sense her even without her speaking, it seemed. She glided away, and he took in a deep breath. "I'm only teaching, now. So, it's not… it's not work, really."

"You don't view teaching the future of the FBI as work?" Hannibal asked.

"Well," Will shrugged. "It's work, but… I enjoy it, so it doesn't feel like work."

"Understandable," he agreed, thinking of all the times he'd spent hours in surgery, never feeling a single one of them. "What you're suggesting is that you *don't* enjoy going out into the field, however. Why then are you so determined to return to it?"

Will sighed, reaching out to play with his ballpoint pen. “I help people. I get closure for the victims and their families. If I’m able to do that, then I should embrace it, right?”

“To your own detriment?” Hannibal wondered.

“It doesn’t always make me miserable,” Will countered with another shrug. “It’s just… taxing, I guess. It was just that one incident, which I have recovered from. I’m sleeping well. I don’t have nightmares. I just want to move on from it because I know I could be helping. Kind of hard to help when people look at you like you’re nuts.”

“What do you do for yourself, Will?” he asked. “Do you have hobbies? Interests outside from work?"

Will raised his eyebrow, smiling to himself. “I have plenty of hobbies. I fish, I make fishing lures. I have seven dogs, so… they take up my time, and I love being with them. I work on boat motors for extra cash, but… I don’t need it. I just do it because I enjoy it. I go running. I like quiet nights in with a good book. I take care of myself, I promise you.”

“Do you have friends? Loved ones?” Hannibal pressed.

Will glared up at him, working his jaw in anger. “Do *you*?” he countered.

Hannibal blinked in surprise, tilting his head in acknowledgement. “Not particularly.”

“Then keep your stones to yourself,” Will spat, twirling the chair away from him.

“You think I live in a glass house? You think I am not aware of my own loneliness? It is out of necessity, I assure you,” he said, entirely honest with someone for the first time in his life.

He glanced up at Mischa, who stared at him with guilt on every one of her features. “The same goes for me, doctor,” he replied with a sigh. “No one wants to spend time with someone who can tell them their mother’s last words. Or… or that their boyfriend never loved them before he died. No one likes being picked apart until their insides are exposed, but… I can’t shut it off. I do my best, which doesn’t seem like it’s ever good enough for anyone else.”

The clock clicked over to quarter of eight, and Mischa glided over. ‘My name is Mischa,’ she said softly.

Will bristled, sitting up in the chair to glance around the room. Hannibal watched his thick swallow, and even Mischa’s eyes widened with the realization that he heard her. ‘Mischa Lecter. Tell my brother he is a snob.’

Will laughed, and Hannibal hid his own smile behind his hand while turning away. “This is… *Jesus* I can’t say that.”

“You can tell me anything,” Hannibal encouraged, going to his cabinet to pour himself a much-needed drink.

‘You can tell him that,’ she laughed. ‘He knows it’s true. Do you want a drink too, Will?’

“Yeah,” he chuckled, covering his face in his hands. He sighed while leaning back in the seat. “Can I get a drink too? I realize that’s not professional, but… you’re drinking, and I need to be, too.”

“Is scotch acceptable?” he asked, already gathering another tumbler from the cabinet.

“It’s perfect.”

Hannibal poured him a glass, bringing it to him to slide it across his desk. Will took it with shaking hands, sipping it for courage. “Is there something wrong?” Hannibal asked, knowing full-well what was giving him anxiety. His sister had put him in an awkward position with her requested message.

“No,” Will replied, wincing as the drink burned on the way down. “Yes? I know how this is going to sound, but… your sister is here with us right now. Mischa?” he said slowly. His eyes looked up at Hannibal remorsefully, and Hannibal felt a twinge of guilt in him for doing this to him.

“Is she?” Hannibal asked ruefully while Mischa bobbed in place, bubbling with excitement. Will looked unbelievably uncomfortable, as though he felt he were about to get kicked out of Hannibal’s office for even saying something in the first place.

“Yes,” he said, sipping his drink again.

‘Tell him,’ she pressed.

“She wants me to tell you that… that…” he stalled out, tipping his head. “Out of everything I could possibly relay for you, you want me to say that?”

‘Tell him his suits are ridiculous, and that he’s a snob,’ she laughed.

“My God,” Will said, laughing awkwardly while covering his face again. “Okay. You *apparently* want me booted out of the office, but fine. She said that your suits are… *ridiculous*, and that you’re a *snob*.”

Will’s face bloomed vibrant pink while Hannibal stared down at him in wonder. *He could hear her*.

‘You can hear me,’ she said just as he thought it.

“I can hear you,” he agreed, sipping his drink. His eyes lifted to Hannibal’s again, and he stood from the chair. “I’ll show myself out,” he offered politely.

“Will,” he called out, stopping the man from quitting the room. “Wait. You… you can hear her?”

‘She’s…” Will tilted his head with a laugh. “Loud.”

‘Excuse me,’ she said indignantly. ‘I am *hardly* yelling!’

“It’s just your voice, dearest,” Hannibal laughed. “It carries.”

Will’s eyes snapped to his own, his mouth falling open. “Can… can *you* hear her?”

Hannibal sipped his own drink, nodding his head. “Since she passed when I was ten, she’s been with me. Can you see her?” he wondered.

Will glanced around the room, entirely passing over her where she loitered directly in front of his face. ‘Guess not,’ she sighed.

“I can hear you, but I’ve never been able to see… people like you,” he admitted, glancing up at Hannibal with a hesitant grin. “Can you see her?”

“Yes,” he said truthfully for the first time in at least twenty-five years.

“The two of you… *fucked* with me,” Will laughed. “That’s a first.”

“I never meant to do so,” Hannibal said in contrition. “You must understand that I’ve been to countless self-acclaimed mediums who said they were capable of speaking with the dead. Not a single one of them heard her. Even when she was screaming in their faces, they never heard her. I was very skeptical of your gift.”

‘You’re the first person I’ve spoken to in thirty years,’ she said in wonder, gliding around Will like he was a shiny new toy. ‘Aside from my dear brother, of course,’ she laughed.

“Nice to meet you, Mischa,” Will said to the room. His smile was warm, though his eyes were cautious. “I’ve never heard of anything like this. She’s never… moved on? She’s stayed with you since you were a kid?”

‘He needed me,’ she shrugged. ‘I could hear his grief like it was… like it was inside of me. I felt the pull after I passed. Like… an urge to *go* though I couldn’t say where. Hannibal’s pull on me was greater, though.’

“She’s tethered to you,” he realized, sipping his drink again. “She’s with you because somehow, after she died, she tied herself to you.”

“Is it that uncommon?” Hannibal wondered, pacing the room. “Ghosts haunt buildings, don’t they? Occasionally?”

“They linger in places of their choosing instead of moving on,” Will replied. “They never linger with people. She goes wherever you go?”

‘Everywhere,’ Mischa agreed. ‘Like an obnoxious shadow.’

Will laughed, rubbing his face with his hand as though in disbelief over the situation. Hannibal could concur entirely. “Usually, those that linger after they’ve passed are angry or grief-ridden,” Will said softly. “You don’t sound unhappy.”

‘Why would I be?’ she laughed. ‘Look at that ray of sunshine I spend my afterlife with,’ she teased.

Hannibal scowled at her, making Will laugh more. “She’s something.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal agreed reluctantly.

‘Can we keep him, brother-mine?’ she asked, gliding around Will in delight. ‘I like him.’

“We cannot keep him, as he is a person and not a pet, sunshine,” Hannibal chuckled, looking to Will apologetically.

Will laughed awkwardly, shaking his head. “I uh… I would not be opposed to visiting you. Both of you. If… if you want that.”

“I do,” Hannibal said immediately, just as Mischa shrieked in delight. ‘Yes! Yes, yes!’

“Okay,” Will said, raising a hand to calm her down. “Alright. Calm down. Jesus, this is surreal.”

‘Does he like Game of Thrones?’ Mischa asked, then paused. ‘My God! I don’t have to ask *you* to ask *him*. I can just ask him. Will, do you like Game of Thrones?’

“Long live Daenerys Targaryen,” he laughed while Mischa bounced in place. “She’s remarkably hip with the times.” He considered something for a moment, wincing. “Sorry. It’s a habit to speak around you guys. Uh… *you’re* remarkably hip with the times.”

‘Hannibal lets me watch tv,’ she shrugged. ‘He likes to cook, and sometimes it takes hours for him to make a meal. Watching him make food that I can’t eat or smell is boring, so… he puts the tv on for me. You kinda look like Rob Stark,’ she mused.

“No,” he laughed, shaking his head. “I definitely don’t look like Richard Madden. He’s…”

‘Gorgeous?’ Mischa asked mischievously.

“Yeah,” Will chuckled. “Absolutely gorgeous.”

Mischa glanced at Hannibal with a raised eyebrow, as if she’d brought it up to ascertain his sexuality. Hannibal shook his head at her, and she pouted.

He went to his desk, signing the paper for Will’s release from his care and handing it off. “Did you just rubber stamp me?” he asked, amused.

“There’s nothing wrong with you,” Hannibal said pointedly, maintaining eye contact for the brief few moments that Will allowed him to. “If there is something wrong with you, then there is something wrong with me, as well. You can return to work, Will.”

“Thank you, Doctor Lecter,” he said softly, blushing while glancing down at his shoes. Beautifully endearing.

“Perhaps you’d care to join me for dinner at my home tomorrow night?” Hannibal asked cautiously. “It would be the least I could do for… taking your time.”

‘Can we go to his house instead?’ Mischa asked in excitement. ‘He said he has dogs!’

“You’re welcome to come to my house,” Will chuckled. “I live in Wolf Trap, though. It’s quite a drive.”

‘We don’t mind long drives, do we brother-mine?’ Mischa cooed.

“Certainly, we do not,” he nodded. “I will bring dinner, nonetheless.”

The enigma that was Will Graham left his office shortly afterwards, and Hannibal watched him leave the hallway, then followed him to the window to watch him walk to his Volvo down the street. Mischa floated nearby, staring at him knowingly. ‘Someone’s got a crush,’ she teased.

“He knows more about this than we do,” Hannibal sighed. “He’s spoken to more… like you than likely anyone else in the world. He might have some insight.”

‘Don’t pretend you want to see him again because of me,’ Mischa laughed. ‘The way you looked at him said it all.’

“I won’t lie to you, dearest,” he said, watching the Volvo pull away from the curb. “I am entirely, utterly, intrigued.”

The drive out to Wolf Trap was pleasant. Buildings and city life gave way to long stretches of quiet highway, then curvy roads that led out past the creek. He almost missed Will’s house entirely, as the road that led to his street was overgrown with bushes and trees. He found it, though. It was an older home, but maintained with a loving hand. The sun was setting behind the tree line further along the left of the property, casting long shadows outlined in gold.

‘Lives in the sticks,’ Mischa said, manifesting by his side with a beaming smile. The sunlight passed right through her, making her seem like she was glowing.

“He certainly does,” Hannibal agreed. He unpacked the travel tote of stew he’d made, along with a few loaves of artisan bread he’d bought at the local bakery in Baltimore before he left. There was a bottle of red wine that would perfectly compliment the hearty beef in their stew, as well. Though he wasn’t sure if Will Graham was a wine drinker. He suspected he was not.

They made their way up the porch stairs, but Hannibal couldn’t knock as his arms were completely full. He deliberated for a moment, before Mischa laughed. ‘One moment, brother-mine,’ she said, before passing through the door. He heard a startled yelp from Will inside before the door was yanked open.

Seven dogs barraged his legs, and he shifted his feet to allow them to pass. “She scared the ever-loving shit out of me,” Will laughed.

“She enjoys doing that,” Hannibal agreed with a laugh of his own. “Did she make creepy noises, or did she at least say something?”

‘I said, ‘*you’re not alone, Will*,’ in my best crotchety old man voice,’ she beamed, utterly pleased with herself.

“A weird thing to hear when your head is in the fridge looking for a beer,” Will laughed. “Come in, please.”

The house was quaint inside, even if Will Graham lived like a bachelor. There were motor parts strewn about, fishing rods mounted to the walls in ways that were not meant to be decorative, and a bookshelf stuffed with books ranging in all manner of interests. Despite all the dogs that lived in the home, it didn’t reek of them. Will clearly took care of them, and it showed.

“You really didn’t need to… to bring dinner,” Will sputtered. “I could have made us something. I caught two really awesome trout the other night. They’re gutted and scaled in the freezer.”

“It’s nothing,” Hannibal assured him, setting the Dutch oven on the counter to get the stove on. “An hour or so, and we’ll be having dinner. It was the least I could do for utilizing your gift in this way.”

“I don’t know how much I can help you,” Will admitted, heading back to the living room to let his dogs back in the house. Each one stopped at the door as they came in, allowing Will to clean their feet with a towel hung by the door for that purpose. He took good care of them, and they were clearly good dogs. Mischa was utterly smitten with them, not that they noticed her at all. “Despite the fact that I can hear her, I don’t… I don’t really understand my gift at all. I’m not sure how I can help you, or what it is you want from me.”

Hannibal set the pan in the oven, heading into the living room to take in Will’s nervous expression. “There isn’t anything I want you to do,” he admitted. “I don’t understand her presence in my life any more than I understand why only I can hear her. You are the first one in thirty years that’s heard her. All I want, really, is company. Someone who can be in my presence and won’t call Frederick Chilton if I begin talking to her in front of them. Believe it or not, it’s as simple as that.”

‘Plus it’s nice for me,’ she said, gliding around the house to take everything in. ‘I never get to talk to anyone but Han, and while he’s great, it can be… lonely.’

“I bet,” Will agreed, glancing around the house as if trying to decide where she was.

“She’s by your bookcase,” Hannibal offered, making Will grin to himself.

‘I love reading,’ she sighed. ‘Can’t pick up books to read them, though. Or… you know, turn the page. Hannibal reads to me at night sometimes, but… he doesn’t really like the same books as I do.’

Will frowned, walking to the bookcase and in effect, walking straight through her. She didn’t flinch, but Will shivered. “Sorry. Didn’t know you were there.”

‘Happens,’ she shrugged.

“I have a case of audio books,” he offered, holding them out for Hannibal to take. “You could put them in a cd player, and she could listen to someone read to her when you’re busy, Doctor Lecter.”

“Please,” he said softly, taking the cd case from Will’s hand. “Call me Hannibal.”

‘Audiobooks!’ Mischa beamed. ‘Why didn’t you think of something like that, Doctor Smartass?’

“Mischa,” Hannibal sighed.

‘Open it and flip through it for me,’ she pleaded, hovering over Hannibal’s shoulder like… well, a ghost. He unzipped the case, opening the cd holder to flip through it. ‘Oh my God he has Game of Thrones! All of them!’

“I do,” Will chuckled.

‘Han’s been reading me A Feast for Crows, but he really doesn’t like fantasy novels,’ she sighed. ‘Now you don’t have to read to me, brother-mine!’

He had to admit, he was relieved. There were only so many dragons and iron thrones he could read about before he felt aggravated by all of it. If he had to read about one more beheading, he would behead someone himself.

He wouldn’t, but… sometimes the urge was there.

It would devastate Mischa if she knew the kinds of things he considered doing on occasion, and he would never hurt her in that way. He flipped through the audiobook case slowly, letting Mischa read the titles and exclaim in excitement occasionally.

“I will return them to you just as soon as she finishes them,” he said gratefully.

“Don’t want them back,” Will shrugged. “I don’t reread books, really. I’ll never relisten to the audiobooks, either. It’s a gift.”

‘He is amazing,’ Mischa sighed. ‘Sorry. Habit. *You* are amazing. Thank you.’

Will laughed, reaching down to pet one of his dogs. “It’s nothing.”

Hannibal set the case down, taking in each dog that was loitering around their master’s legs. “And who are they?”

“This is Winston,” Will said, petting the tawny fur on the loyal dog’s head as it stared at Hannibal judgmentally. “Don’t mind him. He’s a good dog, just… wary of new people. That’s Zoe, with the overbite. Max is the big goof that’s black and white. Jack is the one trying to eat my shoes…” he stalled out. “*Jack*! Quit it!” The dog immediately skulked away, and he nodded. “That’s Harley on the bed. Buster is that one, slobbering all over the place with his bone. And the old lady is Ellie. She’s a sweet thing.”

“Nice to meet you,” Hannibal chuckled. They each had their own personalities, and it was clear despite having just met them.

‘God, I want to pet Winston,’ Mischa whined. ‘He looks soft. Is he soft?’

“So soft,” Will replied, running his fingers through his fur. “You can’t conjure touch?”

‘What?’

“Some… like you, can. Manifest energy and knock things over, be seen, touch things and move them around. You can’t do that?” he asked the room.

Mischa glided around to the window, floating through the foot of the bed. ‘I can, but it’s really brief. Like… a split second at a time. It takes up so much energy for me that the moment I move something I dissolve to the Middle Place.’

“Middle Place?” Will asked, glancing at Hannibal for elaboration.

‘It’s like… here but *not* here. I can interact with my surroundings there, but there’s no one else around me. Time moves more slowly there. I can spend fifteen minutes in the Middle Place, but it’s been eight hours here.’

“Like a purgatory, maybe?” Will wondered, pacing his living room. “From what I understand, it’s like a muscle. The more you do it, the less energy it will take. I’ve been to a few… haunted houses. They don’t disappear after they throw shit around anymore, I can tell you that. How long do you disappear from here when you move something?”

‘Three hours or more in the Middle Place,” she shrugged.

“It’s about two days, here,” Hannibal elaborated. “She’s shattered a few teacups in frustration. She’s slid coins to me, as well as turned on the television. Not that she got to enjoy it once it was on,” he chuckled.

‘Nice of you to criticize me over being dead,’ she rolled her eyes.

“You said that was thirty years ago?” Will asked.

“Exactly,” Hannibal said with a grimace. “Thirty years ago this December.”

“I’m so sorry,” Will sighed.

‘I’m literally right here,’ she giggled.

“She’s… aged up with me,” Hannibal admitted, glancing at Will for an explanation. “She died when she was six. Yet, she is about twenty, I’d guess.”

“That’s common, actually,” Will explained. “People often say their loved one’s ghosts were older or younger than they were when they died. It’s entirely up to her on how she wants to look, as she’s not restrained by physical boundaries. How old were you when she passed?”

‘My brother was ten,’ she supplied, as Hannibal hadn’t been ready to discuss the worst day of his life, yet.

“So she’s stopped aging at twenty, and you’re forty. She must have some say over how she looks, then,” Will reasoned.

‘I like being young,’ she reasoned. ‘Not that I feel I have any control over how I look. If I do, it’s not a conscious decision.’

“What’s astounding is how long she’s stayed,” Will said, wandering off towards his kitchen. “You want something to drink, Hannibal?”

“I brought wine,” he nodded. “I’ll open the bottle if you have a corkscrew?”

“Sure,” Will said, rifling through a drawer to procure it.

Mischa drifted right through the floorboards to go upstairs, and Hannibal sighed. “I hope you don’t mind her snooping,” he said with a scowl. “She has lost all sense of manners in her afterlife.”

“We would, too,” Will laughed. He opened a beer for himself and handed Hannibal a juice glass with a wince. “I don’t own wine glasses, I’m sorry.”

“It’s just fine, thank you,” he said, taking the juice glass that had white daisies printed on it.

‘So the bed in your living room,” Mischa said, sticking her head between the floorboards. ‘That’s… that’s literally your only bed?’

Will sipped his beer with a grin. “Yep,” he admitted, tossing Hannibal a teasing smile.

‘You just… sleep in your living room? Han, he’s weird.’

“Mischa,” he chastised her, shaking his head while pouring the wine he’d brought. “I’m so sorry,” he said to Will.

‘No, seriously,’ she continued. ‘He’s got pictures of dead people on a corkboard up here.’

“He’s a profiler for the FBI, dearest,” he replied after a sip of wine.

‘I thought he was a medium?’ she said, drifting down from the ceiling to float by the back door.

“There’s no money in that,” Will admitted with a shrug. “Most… forgive me, Mischa, but… most dead people don’t linger like you do. They move on when that pull you described happens. They can pop in sometimes on their loved ones, but… it’s fleeting. The odds of me being around someone when it happens are next to nothing. It *has* happened, I’m not saying it never does, but… it’s rare. Besides that, I would never take someone’s money to relay a message from their loved ones. *Never*. I wouldn’t want it done to me, so…”

‘Now I feel bad for calling you weird,’ Mischa sighed. ‘You’re a good man, and you’re gorgeous. A complete package.’

“Mischa,” Hannibal scolded again, laughing despite himself. “She’s in rare form tonight.”

Will blushed, tipping his face towards his shoes. “We should work on your ability to manipulate this plane,” Will offered, pointedly ignoring her compliment. “Start small and work our way up.”

‘It’s lonely in the Middle Place,’ she said softly. ‘I don’t like being there, and I don’t like leaving Hannibal for days at a time. He gets lonely, too. I think that upsets me more than being lonely myself.’

“Well,” Will shrugged. “He won’t be lonely. We’re… friends now, and he’s got me. Right?”

“Do I?” Hannibal asked in amusement.

‘Does he?’ Mischa beamed. ‘Well, let’s get practicing, then. Who has a penny?’

Will withdrew one from his pocket, pressing it flat against the counter. “Focus not so much on moving it, but… touching it. Don’t conjure all your energy for something so small. Exert the right amount of force, okay?”

‘God, he’s pushy,’ she sighed. Hannibal watched her flex her fingers, then her right-hand burst into light. Will did not see anything at all, eyes clearly fixed on the penny, only. She pressed her finger against it and slid it down the counter.

“Shit,” Will breathed.

‘Shit,’ Mischa sighed, winking right out from this plane.

“She’s gone,” Hannibal noted, pouring himself another glass of wine. “She’ll be back in a day or so. Dinner is ready, if you’re hungry?”

“I’m so sorry,” Will blurted, eyes still fixed on the penny in awe. “I… I didn’t mean to take her from you like that.”

“Will,” he chuckled. “She’ll be back. She’s been tethered to me for three decades. I can go a day without her telling me that I am boring. Dinner?”

Will nodded, leaving the penny right where Mischa left it.

“This is… *fantastic*,” Will moaned. The noise he made felt like it cut through Hannibal’s gut, it was so unrealistically erotic. All he did to earn noises like that was make a stew. He felt unworthy, really.

“I am glad you like it. Thank you for taking the time to speak with her. You truly made her very happy.”

“I don’t feel like I did anything,” Will admitted while spooning another helping of stew into his reddened mouth. He shredded a chunk of bread from his slice, dipping it into the broth. “Can I ask… how she died?”

Hannibal stilled his hands, taking a minute to gather himself. “Forget it,” Will blurted. “I didn’t… I never meant to make you upset.”

“I don’t know why I find it difficult to speak about it. If you asked her, she would tell you without a moment of hesitation,” he admitted softly. “She does not view her passing the same way that I do.”

“She knows life goes on,” Will pointed out. “A different version of it, but it still goes on. I don’t know what exists for her beyond this, but… it must be good, right? People tend to go there and only stop in occasionally. You feel that you’ve lost something, but… she’s just continuing life the way that she knows it, now. Although your situation with her is not like most people’s.”

“We lived in Lithuania,” he began softly, stirring his stew while recalling that dreadful time in his life. “My father was a count, there. We had an estate, or… a castle, depending upon how you looked at it. There was much civil unrest in the neighboring towns during my childhood, not that my sister or I knew it.
“The people around us were starving and poor, losing their homes and their lives to illness, while my family prospered and survived without issue. A group of men broke into the estate in the winter… they were starving and angry that we lived better than they did. They killed our parents in front of us, then chained us up as none of them could bring themselves to kill a child.”

“I am… Hannibal, really. You *don’t* need to do this,” Will sighed, reaching hesitantly to cover Hannibal’s hand with his own.

“I do not mind speaking of this with you,” Hannibal admitted, surprising himself with the truth of it. “You might understand me better than anyone has since that day, and… I feel very grateful to you for it.”

Will’s mouth lifted in a small smile, warming Hannibal from the inside. “We were with those men for four weeks. They pillaged our food stores. They stole our guns and knives. The entire time, Mischa and I were fed very, very, little. We weren’t kept with them in the parts of the house that they lit with fires, so we huddled as best we could to keep warm. She grew sick. Pneumonia, I believe. Her cough was wet, almost, like she was choking on her own spit. She was all I had in the world, and I loved her… I love her so dearly. She died one night while I slept curled around her cold body. Within the week, the men disappeared and left me for dead with her.
“I wanted to be dead with her, but… she appeared suddenly, begging me to stay alive and well. She forced me to fight to free myself, then to leave for help. I thought she was a dream, then.”

“She came back to you to save you,” Will realized, swiping his eyes to hide the tears that coursed from them. “She’s the reason you’re here.”

“Among other things,” Hannibal sighed, making Will frown in curiosity. “I stayed in an orphanage afterwards while they searched for my aunt and uncle that lived in France. My time there was not… pleasant. I spoke to Mischa often, but… the other boys there obviously could not see her. I was beaten daily for being different, and I stayed there for over a year.”

“How the hell did you become such a good man?” Will asked boldly. “You’re… you’re so *decent*. Most people would become monsters after all you’ve lived through.”

Hannibal maintained a neutral expression, keeping the truth of that statement to himself. “I likely would be very different, had my sister not returned to me as she has. I’d never do anything that would… hurt her. Even though she is not alive, technically.”

“Did they finally find your aunt and uncle?” Will asked.

“They did,” Hannibal admitted. “My life improved dramatically in their care. I was encouraged in anything I wanted to do. They let me take piano lessons and art classes. They let me take courses in culinary as well as medicine. My aunt got my inheritance for me, as I had not the slightest clue how to get it for myself. It was while I was living with them, though, that I learned that I couldn’t speak to Mischa when I was with other people. Initially, they allowed me to speak with her. They believed I was grieving, working through the pain of her loss by keeping an imaginary friend. After a time, when I grew into a young man, they felt enough was enough.”

“You never had her do the penny thing?” Will asked with a laugh.

“She could not do that, yet. Believe it or not, that’s a new revelation. Perhaps only five or six years ago, I’d guess.”

“They sent you to a therapist,” Will said knowingly.

“They did,” he agreed. “I imagine the same must have happened to you, no? How old were you when you first heard them?”

“Probably younger than seven,” he shrugged. “I couldn’t tell you, really. I thought it was something everyone could do, no questions asked. I talked to them sometimes, and like you, my parents allowed it because I was little, and kids are weird. As I got older, it became a concern. I went to my grandmother’s funeral when I was twelve, and… I didn’t know shit about her will or anything like that. My uncle was left out of the will, apparently. I heard my grandmother’s voice by my side as though she were right there. ‘Look at him, crying. Not over me, but over the money I didn’t leave him.’ I repeated what she said verbatim, and it caused a fucking white trash ho-down at a funeral.”

Hannibal laughed, reaching out to grip Will’s wrist in his palm. Will turned his hand, lacing their fingers. It felt natural. It felt… right. For the first time in thirty years, someone understood him entirely. “I was sent to therapy,” he concluded, ocean eyes fixed on their hands. “Where they determined that I had autism.”

“They feel the need to label everything, even when the thing in question defies labeling,” Hannibal mused. “There is nothing wrong with you, Will Graham. You’re extraordinary.”

He blushed beautifully in response, tilting his head with a shy smile on his face that ignited a fire in Hannibal's belly. "Likewise."

"I should be going," he realized, glancing up in surprise at the lateness of the hour already. He had appointments in the morning, and he was sure Will had classes to teach. "I've taken up quite enough of your time."

"This has been… nice, actually," Will grinned. His hand slid from Hannibal's own, and he immediately felt the loss of it. "If you leave, will you lose your sister?"

"She will manifest herself when she sees fit," Hannibal promised with a smile. "She cannot be anywhere I am not."

"That must be fun when you're out on dates," he laughed.

"I assure you," he said seriously, "it is not."

"I believe you," Will sighed. "Thank you for dinner."

"Anytime," Hannibal said sincerely. "I would… I'd like to see you again. If you'd like that, too?"

"I would," Will's small smile turned into a big one with perfect teeth. "How about this weekend? I could… I don't know, come by? For a bit?"

"Bring your family with you," Hannibal offered, gesturing to the living room full of dogs. "I have to bring mine everywhere I go, so it's no bother if you bring yours as well. Mischa would love that, too. She's always loved animals."

"You want me to bring seven dogs to your house?" Will snorted. "You either really like me, or you really love her."

"I think both things are within the realm of possibility, don't you?"

Will blushed beautifully in response, nodding his head. "Yeah," he shrugged. "It could be possible. I'll bring them, if you're sure."

"I am," he promised. "I'll text you my home address, if that works for you?"

"Sure does," he said, following Hannibal to the door. "Oh! Wait. Her audiobooks!" He jogged over to the end table to get the case, bringing it back to Hannibal with a beaming smile. "So you don't have to read about the dragon lady anymore."

"It's so very appreciated," Hannibal chuckled. "Goodnight, Will."

"Goodnight, Hannibal." He could feel the man's eyes on him as he walked down the driveway, and he could not hold back the goofy grin on his face.

Alana called him later on in the evening the night after he left Will's house. He had just settled in to read a book that he wanted to read, as Mischa still hadn't returned from the

Middle Place, when his phone rang.

“Hey,” she greeted upon answering.

“Alana,” he said politely, though he scowled to himself, as he truly wanted an evening with a book that he wanted to read. “What can I do for you?”

“Well,” she began, not heading off to a good start. “Jack told me that you already signed Will off?”

“I did,” he agreed. “Is that a problem?”

“I… I am not telling you how to do your job, but you were not there for the… outburst he made at that scene, Hannibal. He was devastated. Looking off in the distance, nodding his head. People were talking to him and trying to get him to come back, but… he just kept crying and nodding, saying he’d tell them, he’d tell them. It was… disturbing. I just was wondering if you really think two appointments got to the root of the problem.”

“There is no problem with Will Graham,” he replied, somewhat annoyed. “He does have an empathy disorder, but… he can also converse with the dead. It creates problems on occasion, Alana. He is allowed to have emotions about it.”

“Well, I know that,” she sighed. “I didn’t get the feeling you believed he could speak with the dead. Jack thinks it’s bullshit.”

“It’s not,” Hannibal admitted, placing his book aside. “I did feel that way, but… I don’t anymore.”

“Oh boy,” Alana chuckled. “Who spoke to him in front of you?”

He decided honesty was the best policy. “My sister,” he said softly. “She passed when I was ten.”

“Oh,” she said in surprise. “Jesus, Hannibal. I’m so sorry. Was… was the message heartbreaking?”

“Indeed,” he bit back a laugh, shaking his head. “Quite heartbreaking.”

“I’m so sorry,” she repeated. “It’s unnerving when he just… tells you something like that. Isn’t it?”

“It was surprising,” he shrugged, though she couldn’t see it. “We had dinner last night, as I was so entirely fascinated by his gift.”

Silence descended over the phone line, and he knew he’d overstepped. “Hannibal,” she began. “That… that’s not…”

“Oh,” he interjected in false-startled surprise. “Someone’s at the door. I have to go, so sorry. Goodnight, Alana.”

He hung up on her, tossing his phone to the end table before scooping up his book.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*How* could you do this to me?" Franklyn blubbered, blowing his nose wetly into yet another blameless tissue. "A *referral*? I have abandonment issues, and I've been dumped by my boyfriend *and* the man that I love in two weeks!"

"You very specifically told me that you never loved Tobias," he recalled gently, silently gritting his teeth. He could *not* kill this man. He could not kill *anyone*. His sister would be devastated.

She *was* in the Middle Place, though.

His thoughts drifted, and he forced himself back to attention. "I wasn't talking about loving Tobias!" he wailed. "I was talking about *you*, Hannibal."

"Dr. Lecter," he reminded again, none too gently. "You are not in love with me, Franklyn. You've projected your feelings onto me because I create a safe space with you where you are free to discuss your concerns. I feel it would be best for you if you spoke with a female psychiatrist, someone who you would not feel any attraction towards. Dr. Bloom is the very best. I have not referred you without care."

"Is it because you're… seeing someone?" he asked hesitantly.

Hannibal frowned at him. "Even were I single, Franklyn, I would not pursue a romantic relationship with you."

"Oh *God*," he began crying. Again. "You are! You *are* seeing someone. I knew it, oh God I knew it," he sobbed.

Hannibal handed him the box of tissues, hoping his grimace didn't permanently mar his face.

'How do I *always* come back just as you're in session with this guy?' Mischa blurted out by his side.

"I know it's not what you want to hear," Hannibal said placatingly. "Which is why I am referring you to Dr. Bloom. My love life should not affect you-"

"*Love life*!" he wailed, coming to his feet to pace the room. "You love… is it a him?"

"Franklyn," Hannibal sighed.

"It is! Oh God, you like *men*, but you don't like *me*. It's me, Hannibal. I am the problem, right?"

“Dr. Lecter,” he repeated, mostly to himself, as Franklyn was in no mood to hear anything else.

‘What the hell did I miss while I was gone?’ Mischa asked in interest while gliding across the floor. ‘Are you dating Will? How long have I been gone?’

“Two days,” he said unthinkingly, drawing a confused expression from Franklyn. “What I mean to say is, Dr. Bloom can see you in two days. If I feel that you are a danger to yourself, I will have to call to have you held for observation. These are your options, I’m afraid. Our time has come to an end. Should I make the call, or tell Dr. Bloom that you will see her?”

“I’ll see her,” Franklyn sulked.

“Good,” he sighed. “Take care of yourself, please. It’s high time you put faith in yourself instead of those around you. I wish I could have done more for you.”

“Well,” he said suggestively. “You could… go out with me sometimes? Now that I’m not… you know, your patient?”

Mischa giggled to his side, and he blinked at Franklyn. “Good day, Franklyn. I wish you all the best.”

He glared while leaving the office, huffing while slamming the door.

‘God I missed a lot? What was he saying about you being in love?’

“I am not,” he sighed, then shook his head. “I only allowed him to think as he pleased because if he thought to ask me on a date again, I could not be held responsible for my actions. Will and I have not… dated while you’ve been gone.”

‘You’re a putz,’ she said, rolling her eyes. ‘He’s a great guy.’

“I’ve asked to see him this weekend,” Hannibal confessed, earning himself a sharp little noise of delight from her. “He’s coming to the house for dinner on Saturday.”

‘Too bad. I would have liked to see the dogs,’ she said wistfully.

“He’s bringing them,” Hannibal said with a smile, watching the joy radiate off her. “I asked him to bring them for you.”

“I love you, you know.”

“I know,” he chuckled. “Just as I love you, sunshine.”

‘I’ve got to practice for him!’ she blurted. ‘I want to surprise him by this weekend. How far away is that?’ she laughed.

“Three days,” Hannibal told her. “If you push a penny now, you’ll be back in time to see him.”

‘Perfect,’ she clapped. ‘Penny, brother-mine.’

He dug through his desk drawer, finding a dime in the corner of it. “All I have, but it will do.”

She nodded, focusing on the dime as though she meant to slaughter it. Her hand glowed bright, and she reached for it. The dime slid along his desk, then further. Then further. Hannibal raised an eyebrow as it fell to the floor, where she followed along by pushing it against the rug. ‘Damn it,’ she sighed, then winked out from the office altogether.

He smiled to himself, picking up the dime from the floor that Mischa had pushed with nothing other than her inherent energy. Feeling particularly sentimental, he pressed it into the binding of his planner, keeping it separate from the other change in his desk drawer.

He was leaving his office the following night where there was a timid knock at his office door. He paused while packing away his paperwork to head home, heading to the door where he could smell the faintly floral scent of Alana’s perfume even before he swung the door open. “Alana,” he said warily. “What can I do for you?”

“Can I please come in?” she asked. She was always the very essence of polite, and Hannibal had always found it to be charming.

“Please,” he said, gesturing into the room. She walked in with a tight expression on her face, tasteful heels clicking lightly against the flooring. He closed the door behind her, moving toward his curio cabinet for a drink. “Care for a drink?”

“No, thank you,” she said softly.

He gave her a curt nod before pouring himself a few sips of brandy for fortitude. “This is a pleasant surprise.”

“Is it?” she asked defensively. “I saw Will in the breakroom today and asked how his sessions went with you. He said very specifically that you were not his therapist, and he wasn’t seeing you… professionally. That you were *friends*, Hannibal.”

“We are,” he agreed after a sip of his drink. “You asked me to evaluate him for work, and that’s precisely what I did.”

Alana shook her head, tension mounting in her shoulders. “I referred him to you as a patient. You *saw* him as a patient. Twice. You then signed him off, and went to his house for dinner the following night? That’s… Hannibal that’s shockingly unprofessional of you.”

“There is nothing wrong with Will Graham,” he said confidently. “He is coherent and capable of making rational decisions. He handles the burden of his… gift and his empathy disorder the best he can, and he is not self-destructive. He is not a danger to himself. He does not, nor did he need a therapist.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” she said irritably. “However, your practice is not a screening place for friends or dates. You are someone that I’ve looked up to in my career, but I am embarrassed

for you. You signed off on him and went to his house the following night. Can't you see the issue, there?"

"I know I've hurt you," he said instead of replying to the startlingly offensive comment she'd made. It offended him to his very core. Not once in the history of his sessions with anyone had he ever sought friendship or anything else with a patient. Not once.

She winced, shoulders tightening while she crossed her arms. "This is not about us," she said defensively. "We went on three dates, and you weren't interested in more. I am an adult, Hannibal. I'm not here because I'm holding a grudge. I am here because Will needs someone who understands that he exists day to day on the edge of his own sanity. The things he sees and hears, the things he feels from those around him, they're a constant burden on him. Don't you see that his interest in you is merely a reflection of your own interest in him?"

It felt like iced water had been poured into his veins, the idea was so very shocking. They hadn't spent much time reflecting on what Will's empathy disorder was like for him in day-to-day life, and it made him uncomfortable to think that he'd maybe projected his own desires onto the other man. "Do you know that from personal experience?" he asked bitterly.

She winced. "There was a point where I thought I might have… feelings for him. They were immediately returned, and… well, I knew it then. Any interest in Will is returned because he mirrors feelings."

Hannibal's mouth flapped shut. They stood in uncomfortable silence for a few moments, and she continued. "There's ten years between the two of you," she continued unhelpfully.

"And nine between you and I," he pointed out. "I am not seeking a romantic partner in Will," he lied.

She tipped her head ruefully at him, an unwelcomed expression of pity on her face. "Even seeking a friendship with him is not appropriate, given the circumstances."

"Even if he were my patient for two sessions, he is no longer," Hannibal said with more confidence than he felt. "It may be frowned upon, but I can see him without repercussions from the board."

"He is no longer your patient because you *discharged* him from your care," she pointed out carefully. "Did you discharge him because you felt he was one hundred percent well, or did you discharge him so you could see him outside of professional obligation?"

"He is well," Hannibal said adamantly. "For you to suggest anything else would imply that I took advantage of him. I thought you knew me better than that."

"I thought I did, too," she sighed.

Without another word, she left his office.

Mischa manifested later that night, and he was very glad for her return. He was in his bedroom getting ready for bed when he heard her through the door. ‘Are you naked, brother-mine?’

He sighed. “No, dearest.”

She breezed through the doorway, glancing around the space. ‘How long was I gone that time?’

“One day,” he informed her, smiling at the bright beam of a smile she gave him in response. “You came back much more quickly this time.”

‘I know,’ she grinned. ‘If I keep trying, maybe I’ll get better at it like Will said I would?’

“Perhaps,” he said, settling his cufflinks down on his dresser.

‘Uh-oh. What’s the matter? You’re… moping.’

“I am not,” he scoffed, moving toward his closet to hang his blazer and waist coat.

‘You are,’ she argued. ‘What happened?’

“Alana came to see me today,” he admitted, glancing at her for a moment before turning away. “She… does not approve of me seeing Will after I’ve treated him. Some of the things she said… I can’t help but agree with her, in a way.”

‘She’s jealous,’ Mischa said bitterly. ‘Jealousy is boring, Hannibal. It didn’t work out between the two of you, so what? You have to live your life like a monk because she didn’t get you into bed?’

“I truly do not ever want to speak of my sex life with you,” he cringed, tugging his belt from his pants with a shiver.

‘Or the lack-there-of,’ she giggled. ‘Stop getting naked, please.’

“Mischa,” he sighed. He was the furthest thing from naked. She could be ridiculous, on occasion.

‘I haven’t seen you smile like you’ve smiled for Will in thirty years,’ she said softly. ‘Never, Hannibal. Sometimes you smile for me, but it’s wistful. You’re alive, brother-mine. You need more than the ghost of me in your life.’

“You’re enough,” he assured her, throat tightening with something he wouldn’t name. He did want more than just her in his life. It was selfish of him because he’d gotten to keep her even after she’d left him. He couldn’t even imagine who he’d have become if he had lost her, truly, that dreadful night.

‘Don’t sabotage this with him because your jealous ex doesn’t like it,’ she reasoned. ‘I like him, Hannibal. Don’t take him away from me because of her boring ass.’

He'd do anything for her. She knew that, and she played that card beautifully. If he was relieved that he got to keep seeing Will because of it, then that was a secret he'd keep to himself.

His doorbell rang promptly at six, and Mischa glided right through it to greet him before Hannibal even got to the door. He heard Will's bright laugh, then Mischa's vibrant giggle.

He opened the door to find her hovering in the army of dogs around Will's feet.

Will himself stood there, smiling wide as his eyes lifted to meet Hannibal's own.

If his heart stopped for a moment, he'd never tell a soul.

The blue of his button-down shirt was the exact shade of his ocean blue eyes, which were wide and sparkling with mirth. His curls had been tamed down, parted enticingly so an errant strand curled over his forehead. He was the very definition of ethereal beauty. His youthful complexion, flawless even in the harsh porch light. The enticing expanse of his long throat, displayed by the open buttons at the collar of his neck.

He was appraising him so intently that it took him a moment to realize that Will was appraising him, as well. For a moment, he wished he would have thought to get his waistcoat or his blazer instead of opening the door in a white button-down with the shirtsleeves rolled up. "Hi," Will said after his eyes slid over him, his pink tongue wetting his lips.

Hannibal swallowed. "Hi," he replied, entirely undignified.

"Can I come in?" Will laughed, swaying as one of his dogs tugged their leash hard in the opposite direction.

"Forgive me," he cleared his throat. "Please," he gestured with his hand for Will to come in.

Mischa flicked a knowing look at him, looking entirely pleased with herself while she glided through the door. 'You clean up good,' she said to Will, floating around him as he untied his dogs' leashes. 'Like, really good. You're a snack. Isn't that what people say, now?'

Hannibal wished the floor would swallow him whole, while Will's blush made his cheeks ruddy. "Uh," he laughed awkwardly, tipping his face away to place his dogs leashes aside. "Thank you?"

'I speak only wisdom and truth,' she shrugged. She leaned forward to pet a dog, making a fist when she realized that she couldn't. 'Hannibal, pet this dog. Describe the fluff to me.'

Hannibal chuckled while leaning over to pet Winston, who's tongue lolled out from the attention. "He feels like… silk, I suppose. The fur behind his ears feels just like Putinas did."

'Aww!' she squeaked. 'Putinas! I loved her.'

Hannibal turned to Will with a smile. “Putinas was her rabbit when she was small,” he explained. “She named it the English equivalent of the word for ‘snowball’.”

‘I was four,’ she said defensively.

“No judgement,” Will laughed. “Food smells good,” he said to Hannibal with a smile still stretching his pink lips.

“Roasted chicken,” Hannibal admitted, leaning over to pet another dog. Max, he thought his name was. “Fingerling potatoes and roasted vegetables.”

‘It’s taken him hours,’ Mischa sighed. ‘But I’ve been listening to my audiobook while he’s been cooking! So thank you for that.’

“It’s no problem at all,” Will smiled, glancing around the foyer with wide eyes. It was as if he just realized the grandiosity of Hannibal’s home, and it seemed to shock Will into stillness.

‘He likes to live like a vampire in a castle,’ Mischa said, knowing full-well what was shocking him. ‘I’m surprised we don’t have a moat.’

Will laughed while Hannibal scowled. “It’s a perfectly reasonable home,” he said defensively. Will eyed the enormous floral arrangement on the round table at the center of the foyer, biting his lip to keep from laughing.

‘Reasonable for a vampire,’ Mischa agreed. ‘A rich, old, vampire.’

“It’s… lovely,” Will said, clearly lying through his teeth while looking up at the old brass chandelier above the round table.

“It was built in 1909,” Hannibal said proudly. “It was in near shambles when I purchased it and I had it restored as closely as possible to what it was when it was built. The flooring here is original, as is that chandelier, although it has been rewired.”

‘I like Will’s house more,’ Mischa said, making Hannibal roll his eyes rudely. ‘It’s got windows that look out at things like trees instead of other people’s houses.’

“I was just finishing dinner,” Hannibal said, ending the conversation about his old house once and for all. “Would you care to join me, Will?”

“Sure,” he agreed, following Hannibal into the kitchen.

He sat at the kitchen island while Hannibal continued cooking, Mischa gliding around the space with interest. His dogs did not follow him into the kitchen, as it seemed there was a rule about such things. Instead, there was a line of them sitting by the threshold, all looking miserable and put out.

He’d left a penny on the counter for Mischa, who showed Will her newest accomplishment immediately. It slid a few inches, and Will startled, as he didn’t know she was going to do something like that. ‘I’ve been practicing,’ she said proudly.

“You’re still here,” Will laughed, staring down at the penny in delight.

‘Yeah,’ Mischa shrugged, though he couldn’t see it. ‘If I do anything more than that, I’ll disappear. I can feel it.’

“Keep practicing,” Will told her. “It should get easier with time.”

‘I wanted to be here for your visit tonight,’ she giggled. ‘It’s nice talking with you.’

“Likewise,” Will blushed.

‘Do you have brothers or sisters?’ Mischa asked, gliding around the island.

“No,” Will said immediately, then paused. “Well, I guess I wouldn’t know? I might have a half-brother or half-sister somewhere. My Mom left when I was very small, and I’ve never seen her again.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Hannibal said remorsefully, turning from the stove to find Will looking slightly rigid.

“It’s fine,” Will said reassuringly. “My Dad and I did just fine without her.”

‘You’ve got… kind of an accent?’ Mischa prodded. ‘Where are you from?’

“Mischa,” Hannibal sighed, glancing at her with a reproachful expression.

“It’s okay,” Will assured him. “I don’t mind. I’m from everywhere, really. I’ve lived in Louisiana and Mississippi. I’ve lived in Michigan and Virginia. Growing up, I never really lived in one place for a long time. We moved around a lot.”

‘We have, too,’ Mischa said gently. ‘How many countries have we lived in, now?’

“Actually lived in?” Hannibal asked, thinking back on it. “Five.”

“Wow,” Will laughed. “Very well-traveled.”

‘There was a point where I wasn’t sure how long I’d get to stay here,’ she said softly, hovering by threshold where the dogs were laying. ‘I wanted to see as much of the world as I could, and my brother made sure I got to do it.’

Will’s eyes softened when they turned back to Hannibal, a gentle smile on his face. “I was very busy in my youth,’ Hannibal chuckled. “Between medical school, traveling, and my hobbies, I was very, very, busy. I don’t regret it, though.”

“It must have been hard to go through medical school with… well,” he said, blushing while glancing around the room.

‘I stayed out of his hair,’ Mischa said indignantly. ‘I’d drift as far from his classroom as I could, sitting through classes nearby. His intern year at Hopkins was a blast. People would

come in all banged up, and my brother fixed them. Watching him do surgery was like watching a superhero.'

"I bet it was," Will said, eyes smoldering at Hannibal in a way that made his gut clench.

Hannibal turned and busied himself again at the stove, keeping his eyes away from the beautiful man that was openly appraising him.

"Have you ever… met another like you, Mischa?" Will asked hesitantly.

'Nope,' she replied. 'Like I've said, I have only ever talked to Hannibal.'

"Maybe we could test that out, if you want," Will offered. "There's a haunted house in Virginia. Been abandoned for years, probably decades, in fact. Maybe we could go there and see if you… I don't know, see them?"

'Oh my God yes!' Mischa bubbled. 'Like Ghost Hunters, but I am a ghost that hunts ghosts. It would be a better show, don't you think?'

"If people could see you…" Will stalled out, and Hannibal turned to see what was wrong. His expression looked shocked before he came to his feet. "Have you ever taken a photo of her?" Will asked, moving to Hannibal's side.

"Why on earth would I?" he chuckled. "No one can see her, Will."

"People have had success capturing the images of ghosts in the past," he reasoned. "Not so much with digital cameras, but with film. Would you be… opposed if I tried?"

Hannibal blinked at him while Mischa giggled. 'Take my picture, Will. See if you can capture me.'

Will dug his phone out of his pocket, but before he could do more than that, Hannibal stilled his arm. "Promise me that if you… if you capture her image, you won't share it. Swear it to me, Will."

Will swallowed thickly, eyes dipped down to Hannibal's sternum. "I would never breach your trust like that. Never."

Hannibal watched him for another few moments, and Will raised his timid gaze up so their eyes met. "I promise," he said at last.

He nodded, letting Will's elbow go.

"Uh," Will said awkwardly. "I know lighting has something to do with it, but… I confess I don't know, really. How about we try here. Mischa, if you could move… let's try by the threshold? Like right in front of it?"

She glided over without complaint, posing dramatically. 'I'm there!'

"Okay," Will sighed, clicking a few photos.

Hannibal walked over in interest, glancing down at his phone screen that portrayed nothing other than the faces of his eager dogs.

‘Well?’ she asked.

“Nothing,” Will sighed.

“Conjure energy like you’re about to touch something, dearest,” Hannibal told her. “Like there’s a penny in front of you.”

She nodded while Will raised his phone again, getting the camera ready for the shot. “Tell me when,” Will said.

She glowed bright as she pulled energy together. “Now,” Hannibal told him.

The photo was… unbelievable.

“Holy shit,” Will breathed.

‘What?’ she asked excitedly, moving behind them to see herself. There were no features to her, just a glow in the middle of the threshold that whitened everything around where she was hovering. It looked like an aura of her, golden and absolutely beautiful. ‘Is that what I look like to you, Han?’

“No,” he chuckled, sweeping a tear from his cheek. “You look like you… just… translucent. Your edges have no distinct end. Like white light that resembles your features.”

‘So damned poetic,’ she teased, gliding away again to try and get the dogs’ attention.

“I’d like to try again with film,” Will said, glancing up at Hannibal for permission. “If that’s alright with you?”

“Of course,” he agreed. The photo captured the essence of her somehow, even though she was not discernable. Golden light, pure and beautiful. “Dinner is ready, if you’re hungry now?” he said, distracting himself from the incredible man by his side.

“Starving,” Will said breathlessly.

“Good,” Hannibal chuckled. “I’ve made more than enough. I hope you aren’t shy.”

“I think we’ve established that I’m not,” Will laughed.

They settled in to eat, and Hannibal decided now was as good a time as any to question him about how his specific disorder worked. “I didn’t realize you were friends with Alana Bloom,” he began.

Will moaned through a bite of crispy chicken, shrugging his shoulders. “I wouldn’t say we’re friends,” Will said after he swallowed. “More like… she has a professional interest in me but doesn’t like that she does. She is kind to me to make up for the guilt she feels about wanting to pick me apart.”

That… sounded precisely like the opposite of what Alana described to him. “I was under the impression that you… had feelings for her.”

“There was a point initially when I met her,” Will said softly, nudging his food with his fork. “She was so kind to me. She listened when I talked. It was… it was nice, really. It had been so long since someone had taken an interest in me for anything other than my empathy disorder or my… ability. I know she thought she had feelings for me, too, but… I knew they weren’t genuine. Everything she felt for me came with a side order of pity. I absolutely hate being pitied. It never evolved into anything because I couldn’t stand it.”

Something inside of Hannibal settled with that revelation, and he nodded. Alana was very far off-base with her assessment of their… attraction to one another.

“She told you, right?” Will asked knowingly.

Hannibal almost choked on his sip of wine, glancing up in surprise. “Told me what, exactly?”

“She thinks I’m not capable of my own feelings or emotions,” he said pointedly. “She thinks anything I feel or think is just a mirror of someone else’s feelings or thoughts. She thinks I have no autonomy. My gift doesn’t work like that, Hannibal.”

“She…” he sighed, grimacing while a blush worked up his face. “She may have told me that you are interested in being my… friend because I want you to be. Yes.”

“I am honestly so goddamned sick of her,” Will blurted, face flushed while he shook his head.

‘She’s boring,’ Mischa blurted, hovering in and out of the room to look at the dogs, too.

Will laughed. “Nice way of putting that she’s a meddling bitch, but yes. Boring.” His eyes snapped up to meet Hannibal’s own, and the fire in them ignited something hot in Hannibal’s belly. “I am here because I want to be. I am interested in you because you are interesting. I enjoy your company, which is something that hasn’t been true of anyone I’ve met in a very long time. You don’t feel pity for me. You don’t think I’m broken. You see me for what I am, and you understand that it doesn’t make me weak.”

“It makes you very strong, Will,” Hannibal agreed. “I’ve never thought your gift weakened you in any way. Sometimes the things you hear and feel weigh on you, but that’s to be expected. Never feel ashamed of your reactions, and never hide them. At least not from me.”

‘And me,’ Mischa chimed in, gliding through the table to pass her hand through Will’s body. He shivered, a tentative smile stretching his mouth. ‘That’s as close to a hug as I can give you,’ she laughed.

Hannibal’s laugh bubbled out of him, overjoyed that his sister could interact with someone else, and for that someone else to be someone that Hannibal admired, as well. “I don’t think you grasp how very unnerving it feels, dearest,” he chuckled.

‘Describe it,’ Mischa demanded.

“It feels like ice,” Will explained. “Like being cold from the inside, out. Don’t know if that makes sense.”

Mischa tipped her head, considering that. ‘I do know what it’s like to be cold,’ she said softly.

Will blanched, the air in his lungs leaving in a whoosh. Hannibal himself stiffened at the comment, but he had grown accustomed to her saying things of that nature over the years. “Jesus,” Will breathed. “I’m so sorry. That was thoughtless of me.”

‘It’s how I died,’ she shrugged, making Hannibal tense up more. ‘Sorry, Han. I know you don’t like it when I talk about being… well, dead. I’m not upset, Will. It doesn’t… hurt me to think about it. Life does go on, even after. Look at me! At a dinner party, eternally youthful. Life… finds a way.’

Will snorted, glancing up with a bright smile on his face. “Did you… did you just…?”

‘I have a crush on Jeff Goldblum,’ she giggled. ‘I also like dinosaurs. Jurassic Park was my thing, I’m telling you.’

Will laughed, looking to Hannibal in surprise. He knew the movie she spoke of, as she’d made him sit through it several times when it first came to VHS.

He’d done many things he would normally never have done for her.

After dinner, Will helped him clean up the dishes. It felt natural to stand by his side, drying plates as Will handed them off. He and Mischa were in a heated debate about Game of Thrones, so his mind drifted to how incredibly domestic this felt. He’d never been able to have anyone over while acknowledging her presence in any way.

“I can’t believe your favorite character is Jaime Lannister,” Will laughed, elbow deep in the sink. “He’s… *disgusting*!”

‘His sister makes him disgusting,’ Mischa argued. ‘He saved the entire city by killing his king. He was a hero! What thanks did he get? He gets called ‘Kingslayer’ for it. He gets disgraced for saving all the people in King’s Landing. Being made into a villain after something like that is enough to make anyone crazy.’

Will shrugged at that, handing off another pan to Hannibal to dry it. “Okay. I concede your point. Doesn’t change that he joined the kingsguard to… be with his sister.”

‘You have no right to an opinion. Your favorite character is Jon Snow,’ she shivered. ‘He’s so damned boring!’

Will laughed, and even Hannibal found himself smiling in response. “You think everything is boring, sunshine.”

‘I don’t think Will is boring,’ she countered. ‘You… *sometimes*. You need to get out more, Han.’

“Besides, I *like* Jon Snow, but he’s not my favorite character,” Will said after a beat.

She hovered close, reaching out to slide the dish towel away from Will, and he laughed. ‘Who is, then?’

“Petyr Baelish,” he admitted.

Silence descended, and Hannibal glanced up to find his sister’s outraged expression. ‘This conversation is finished,’ she said, shaking her head.

With that, she glided out of the kitchen to head into the living area where the dogs had settled in for naps.

“She’s… strongly opinionated when it comes to pop culture,” Hannibal explained.

“You would be, too,” Will shrugged, handing off the last pan to Hannibal before drying the sink with the dish towel that Mischa had slid away from him. “It’s all she has, really. She can’t interact with her surroundings or with other people. Instead, she gets invested in things that don’t require her to interact with them. She can get lost for a few hours in something that doesn’t require her to do anything other than be absorbed in it.”

“I suppose I’ve never considered that,” Hannibal admitted. “When people come over, she’ll ask me to put the television on while they’re here. It’s always driven me mad, but… it makes sense. Were it not for her, I wouldn’t even own a television.”

Will leaned on the counter, sipping a whiskey that Hannibal had poured for him before they began washing dishes. “You’re very good to her,” Will said softly, eyes raised to meet Hannibal’s own. He stepped into Hannibal’s space, and Hannibal’s breath left him in a whoosh. “Most people don’t take care of their living loved ones like you care for her. You’re a good man, aren’t you?”

His ocean eyes searched Hannibal’s face as if trying to decide something, and Hannibal glanced down at the plush red of his lips. “I try to be,” he conceded.

Will stepped the single step further into his space, leaning up without touching him whatsoever. Soft lips met his own, and he closed his eyes. The kiss was gentle. Unbearably sweet. Will’s head tipped when Hannibal stepped forward, holding Will’s hip while deepening the kiss.

Their tongues met, but only for the briefest moment before Will moved his mouth up to nibbled at his top lip. Strong hands grasped his jawline on either side of his face, holding him close while Will sampled his mouth at his leisure.

Hannibal brought his free hand up, grasping Will’s curls at the nape of his neck to angle his face downward in order to plunder that sweet mouth again. His curls were soft, feathering through his fingertips like down while a soft little sigh of pleasure rumbled from Will’s throat.

They pulled away after a moment, but they didn’t step back from one another. Will’s lips were deliciously damp and red, swollen from Hannibal’s attentions. His ocean eyes were dark and glittering, a rosy blush on his pale cheeks. Their eyes slid over each other’s faces while

Will slid his thumb along one of Hannibal's cheekbones. Hannibal was still enjoying the unbearably soft curls at the nape of his neck, sliding his fingers through them so they parted and wrapped around his fingers like silk.

He leaned forward and kissed Will again, this time chastely. As he was pulling away, a soft tongue licked up, gliding under his top lip, then just under his nose. Hannibal grinned, pressing another kiss to the side of his mouth before pulling away altogether. "You may do that whenever the mood strikes you," he said softly, face hot with a vibrant blush.

"If I kiss you like that every time the mood strikes, we might not ever do anything else," Will laughed.

"Then we do nothing else," Hannibal shrugged. "I'd very much like to take you to dinner. Just the two of us," he elaborated.

"Isn't that kind of rude?" Will chuckled, reaching for his whiskey again while licking the flavor of Hannibal from his lips. "Asking her to go away while we date?"

"She'd spend fifteen or so minutes in the Middle Place," Hannibal shrugged. "We'd get the entire evening to ourselves. I'd very much like to know you, Will."

"I feel like you already do," he said glancing away briefly. "I want to ask you about something, but… you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

"Anything, Will," Hannibal assured him gently.

"What happened to the men that killed your family?" he asked.

"They left once there was nothing else to eat," he said bitterly, glancing away from Will who looked heartbroken for him. "Even after I found help after escaping, there was no police during that time of civil unrest. There was no one to investigate it, nor anyone who cared. I was shipped off to an orphanage along with countless other children that had survived similar circumstances. As far as I know, they live and breathe to this day. Perhaps they've starved to death. I have no way of knowing."

"I hope they died," Will said lowly. "I hope they hurt as much as they hurt you and your family."

Hannibal's belly flipped, and he swallowed thickly. "As do I, Will," he admitted, eyes sliding to Will's hand as it covered his on the counter. "As do I."

Will gathered his dogs up at the end of the evening, hovering by the foyer. "What day works for you for… uh, our date?" he asked with a blush.

"How about tomorrow?" Hannibal wondered, determined to see Will again as soon as possible.

He blushed a little more, tipping his face down to hide it. “Yeah,” he agreed, biting his lip to keep from smiling. “I’d like that.”

“I’ll pick you up for six?” Hannibal asked hopefully.

“I’ll meet you in Baltimore,” Will offered. “You don’t need to drive out to Wolf Trap to get me. There are no restaurants near me, anyway.”

The offer was considerate, but it took away precious moments that could have been spent in Will’s company. He nodded anyway. “If you would prefer to meet me there, that’s fine, too.”

Will smiled, going up on his toes to press a kiss to Hannibal’s mouth just as Mischa breezed into the room. ‘Oh shit! You’re kissing already!’

Will laughed against his mouth, pulling away far more quickly than Hannibal would have wanted him to. “Goodnight, Mischa,” he said to the room before pulling Hannibal in for another chaste kiss. “See you tomorrow, Hannibal. Thank you for dinner.”

“Anytime, Will,” he breathed, eyes closed while savoring Will’s nearness.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY. So I know it probably feels like I'm Alana bashing, but I SWEAR I'm not. Thinking about the way their new relationship looks to an outsider, especially Alana, who in this story is the reason Will was referred to Hannibal in the first place made me realize that she would NOT be okay with it.

I don't think ANY therapist would be okay with it. She's not getting the entire picture between them, and... well, we'd all be a little butthurt to be dropped by Hannibal and then find out he's seeing a patient you referred to him outside of work.

I realize I am a professional Alana-Basher. In this story, I feel like yeah, she's a little jealous. More than anything else, I think she feels like Hannibal really overstepped some boundaries. We all know how she feels about them boundaries.

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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal watched him leave from the porch steps, admiring the steady swagger of his walk, even with seven dogs on leashes around him. The cool autumn air ruffled his curls, and he smiled when Will turned to see if he was still looking with a flirty grin on his face.

He waved, and Hannibal, like a love-struck fool, waved back. ‘Oh *wow* you got it bad,’ Mischa giggled. ‘Not that I blame you, really. If I were alive, I might fight you for him.’

Hannibal sighed while closing the door, turning to her with an exasperated expression. “It’s very new, darling. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

‘Not everything ends badly, Han,’ she said softly. ‘Sometimes good things come into your life, and they’re meant to stay there.’

“Nothing is permanent,” he replied, moving towards his study for a drink. “Nothing, Mischa.”

‘You’re going out with him tomorrow night?’ she asked, pointedly ignoring the dark mood he’d taken to once Will was gone.

“For dinner,” he nodded, pouring himself a drink.

‘I’ll make myself scarce,’ she offered, gliding over to the window to look out at the street. ‘I want this for you, brother-mine. He’s a good man.’

“You don’t need to vanish for it,” he said, feeling immediately guilty for wanting her absence in the first place.

‘I don’t,’ she giggled, ‘but you two should get to know one another a little bit better. That’s easier if I’m not distracting you. Besides, I want to try picking up something bigger tonight, and… it might take a few days for me to come back to you, anyway.’

“Bigger?” Hannibal wondered. “Like what?”

‘I don’t know,’ she laughed, glancing around his study with a clinical eye. ‘How about I try rolling your desk chair away?’

“Go for it, sunshine,” he chuckled.

‘I’ll probably miss Game of Thrones tomorrow night,’ she worried.

“I will set the DVR,” he promised. “We can watch it as soon as you come back to me.”

‘We?’ she asked hesitantly.

He considered the explanation Will gave him for her obsessions, and he found himself nodding. “We,” he agreed.

She beamed at him, going bright with energy before pushing the chair a few feet. She made a little grunt of effort before she winked out from his sight.

This was an enormous achievement. The most she’d ever moved were teacups, silverware, and spare change. She’d moved a big leather office chair possibly three feet before exhausting her energy.

Given enough time, there was no doubt she’d be moving significantly more.

He glanced around his space worriedly, taking in his expensive things. Were she to have a temper tantrum now, it wouldn’t be just a teacup that got shattered.

He swallowed a mouthful of brandy while moving up to his bedroom. Things were replaceable. His sister, who sometimes hated her predicament, was not.

Sunday was a peaceful day for Hannibal. He used to have to see Franklyn in the mornings, as he reserved two appointments a week, and required one of them to be on the weekends due to work scheduling. He hated going to the office on Sundays and tried his best to dissuade the man from scheduling that day by charging an exorbitant weekend fee on top of his regular fees.

It didn’t even give Franklyn pause. He came every Sunday for the last fifty-one weeks.

But who was counting?

While he remembered, he set the DVR for Mischa’s show later on that night before showering and making himself breakfast. There was grocery shopping that needed to be done, so he wrote a list for himself before heading to the store.

The rest of his afternoon was spent playing the harpsichord and sketching, two things that were exceedingly difficult to do with Mischa around.

She winked back into existence while he was in his bedroom getting ready for his date. Through the door, she called to him. ‘Brother-mine,’ she said, singsong. ‘Are you naked, dearest?’

“Yes,” he chuckled. “Give me a moment, please.”

Once his slacks were on and his button-up was shrugged over his shoulders, he called for her.

She breezed through the door, tipping her head at him. ‘Wait,’ she said hesitantly. ‘Are you… are you just getting ready for your date?’

“Yes,” he grinned, her enthusiasm bubbling over to him, as well.

‘I came back again so soon!’ she chirped. ‘Will was right!’

“It seems that he was,” he agreed.

‘Don’t worry,’ she said, breezing around the room with excited energy. ‘I won’t loiter around on your date. I’m going to try moving something bigger. Maybe… maybe pick something up?’

“Or,” Hannibal said with a laugh, “you could stick around. Mischa, I don’t mind.”

‘Well I do,’ she said firmly. ‘You need this with him. He can hear me, too, and I don’t want to distract you guys on your date. Get to know him without me, Han. Now get dressed, I’m going to go pick something up.’

“Please,” he pleaded, “don’t break anything?”

‘Do my best,’ she chirped before breezing through the wall.

There was the distinct sound of something heavy hitting the flooring downstairs, and he sighed while he finished getting dressed.

She’d apparently picked up a dining chair, or at least tipped it over. It laid on its side, several feet from where it should have been. If she actually had managed to pick it up, then this would be the largest thing she’d moved in their time together. His office chair was big, but it wasn’t difficult to push it as it was on wheels. The dining chair was made of mahogany, and it weighed a significant amount.

He righted the chair, tucking it carefully back into place before leaving for his date.

“This place is nice,” Will said, settling across from him at their small table at the back of the restaurant.

He’d specifically asked for this table, as he knew it faced out toward the Chesapeake Bay. The view at night was incredible, the moon hanging over the water and reflecting ghost-like over its surface. Will seemed absorbed by the sight, his wide eyes looking through the window and catching the silver color of the moon in their depths.

“They have excellent seafood,” Hannibal told him, putting the menu aside because he already knew what he’d be getting.

“Black bass it is, then,” Will smiled, setting his own menu aside. It was exactly what Hannibal was getting, as well.

“Mischa moved a dining chair today,” he informed him, cringing a bit at the fact that he brought her up in the first place. Will did not seem upset or annoyed to be discussing her, though. If anything, he beamed.

“You’re going to be in trouble, soon,” Will laughed. “She’s going to break stuff.”

“The thought has already crossed my mind,” he agreed. “I think some of my more precious belongings will go into storage while she figures out what she’s doing.”

“Probably a good idea.”

They placed their orders, and Hannibal requested a bottle of pinot grigio that would compliment their dinners. Will shifted uncomfortably, glancing up at Hannibal with a hesitant expression on his face. “I wanted to ask you about something,” he said softly.

“Anything.”

“Alana Bloom,” he blurted, rubbing at his mouth with his fingertips while looking thoughtful. “You dated her, right?”

“Briefly,” he admitted, glancing out the window again. “I was her mentor in school, and… we’ve stayed close even as she built her practice. I asked her out possibly two months ago, and she agreed. We went on three or four dates, I think.”

“Was it… it wasn’t serious, then?” Will asked nervously.

“No,” Hannibal smiled, reaching out to touch his hand. “Where is this coming from, Will?”

“She said something at work today,” he said, dipping his eyes away. “She wasn’t talking to me, but… I was present when she said it. Someone asked her how things were going with you, and she told them that you broke up. She said it, and then she said that she heard you were rebounding with someone else already. It was said so…” he blushed, hiding his face behind his curls. “So cruelly. There’s no other word for it.”

Something white-hot bubbled just under Hannibal’s skin. Something he’d kept repressed for thirty years, but somehow managed to work its way to the surface now and again. It was unbearably rude to say something like that in front of Will, who she knew Hannibal was seeing occasionally, now. His fingers twitched against the table, and he fought to maintain his neutral expression.

Will looked immensely hurt, so he focused on correcting the hard feelings that she’d cultivated. “I ended things with her,” he explained softly. “She does not know me, Will. I could never tell her that throughout our dates, my sister was hovering around her, telling her that she was boring. When we were at my house, I couldn’t explain why I wanted the television on, even if we were not in the room. I was not attached to her, Will. There is nothing from which I need to rebound. You are… so very much more than anyone has ever been. You’re more than anyone else may ever be, as well.”

His eyes hardened, his jaw clenching while he turned his face to look out the window again. “She said it to upset me,” he realized.

“I imagine so,” Hannibal agreed. “She does not like that I am seeing you. She’s spoken to me about it a few times, now. I think the major issue for her is that… from the outside, what I did

seems very unprofessional. If she herself had done what I did with you, I think I would be just as disappointed with her. I also think there may be a bit of jealousy involved. It's surprising, though. We never became close. She had dinner with me at my house once, and a few times before that when we were only friends. She grew very attached, very quickly."

Will's eyes turned away from the moon, a teasing smile on his face. "You don't know why that is, do you?" Hannibal shook his head, and Will's smile stretched wider. "You're a rarity, Hannibal. Your features are flawless. You are an absolutely beautiful man, and you capture the attention of literally everyone around you without having to say a word. The way you hold yourself, your suits. All of it demands attention. You're intelligent and kind. You've got an old-world charm that just…" he sighed. "It makes Americans think of princes and fairytales. Everyone here wants to be snatched up by someone like you. Having your attention feels like winning the lottery."

It had been a long, long, while since anyone had made him blush quite this hotly. He smeared his fingers against the glass of iced water, collecting the icy condensation to press it against his cheeks. Will laughed, rising from his seat to lean over the table, and Hannibal kissed him eagerly. It was a gentle meeting of their mouths, the lush feel of his lips pressing softly against his own.

It was over as quickly as it started before Will slid back into his seat looking a little flushed himself. "Had to," he explained. "The fact that you have no idea how incredible you are makes you like catnip. Christ, Hannibal."

Hannibal licked the flavor of him from his lips, leaning away as the waiter came with their wine and salads. Once they were alone again, he felt calm enough to speak again. "I am… flattered, Will," he said, wincing that it may be taken as slightly insulting. "I feel the same way about you, as well," he elaborated.

Will smirked, spearing a cucumber slice on his fork. "I know you do," he teased. "I can feel it, in case you forget that."

"I do forget sometimes," he admitted after a bite of his salad. "That gift of yours is… incredible."

"It's *technically* a disorder," he laughed.

"ADHD was considered to be a disorder as well at one point," he pointed out. "It isn't though. Rather it is an evolutionary mismatch to the modern learning environment we have constructed. It's my belief there are no disorders, Will. There are just misunderstood quirks to humanity that don't fit the general construct that most consider to be normal."

Will paused, finishing his bite while staring at Hannibal in a way that made him hyper aware of the fierce intelligence in those eyes. "If only there were more people like you in the world."

Hannibal grinned, reaching across the table to thread their fingers together. "Likewise."

Their dinners arrived, which required Hannibal to retract his hand from the calloused grip of Will's own, regretfully. "You know, even though you signed me off, I haven't been asked to do any consulting since you did."

"Is that… unusual?" Hannibal asked, spearing a bite of perfectly flaky fish onto his fork.

Will moaned, as he'd already gotten a bite into his mouth, and he apparently liked what he was tasting. The sound still cut through Hannibal's gut, warming him from the inside. "It is," he said after a moment. "I'm usually busy every day with something that Jack wants from me, but… it's like I scared him, this time. He's backed right off."

"Does that worry you?"

"I don't know," Will shrugged, spearing a fingerling potato that he mashed with a pat of butter. "I know it's just a matter of time before he asks me again, and I know that it'll likely be a crime scene that he wants me to see. I'm nervous about that, though. No one there has any idea how I do what I do, and they don't know what to do or say when I get… lost in it."

"Why don't I call Jack Crawford," Hannibal offered. "I'll sign some nondisclosures, and when he needs you at a scene, I can go with you."

Will blushed, his shoulders rising in a protective gesture. "I don't need a babysitter, Hannibal."

"That isn't why I'm offering," he replied. "I understand how you do what you do. I understand both of your gifts. I understand you, Will. I'm offering you this because I want to, not because I think you need me there."

Will considered it, twirling his fork against his plate while gnawing his bottom lip. "Are we dating?"

Hannibal choked on his sip of wine, glancing up at Will in surprise. "I thought we were, yes. Why?"

"You think Jack is going to want my… uh, well, boyfriend at a crime scene with me?"

"I can be your anchor," Hannibal offered. "If I can successfully pull you back when you get too deeply involved, then it won't matter who I am to you, will it?"

"We'll have to be upfront with him about it," he sighed. "Alana will tell him whether we talk to him or not."

"I've deduced as much," Hannibal agreed bitterly.

"If he lets you go to scenes, you'll have to talk to Mischa," he said reasonably. "She needs to stay quiet for me when I'm working."

"We can both speak to her at some point," he offered. "She might listen to you more than she listens to me."

“Probably the only soul in the world that doesn’t take you seriously,” Will laughed.

“I’ve been asking her to be quiet in certain situations for thirty years,” he agreed. “She’s realized that there isn’t much I can do about it if she doesn’t listen.”

“Brat,” Will laughed.

“Indeed.”

“She’s so different from you,” he marveled. “How can the two of you be so very different when she’s around you all the time?”

“We were very different, even as children,” Hannibal said fondly. “She was sweet and kind. She giggled madly. She loved animals. She even protected bugs that got into the estate, carrying them outside in her hand or a napkin rather than kill them. I asked her once about that, and she told me that she couldn’t kill them, because they probably had a family that was looking for them.”

“Adorable,” Will chuckled. “What does she look like?”

“She’s honey-blonde,” he said, considering her features. “She has blue eyes, like my father did. She has many of his features, while I tended to take after my mother, aside from my cheekbones. They are very specifically a Lecter trait, which Mischa does not really have. Her skin is very pale, but I can’t recall anymore if it always was. My mother was Italian, and I have her complexion more than my father’s.”

“I wish I could see her,” Will mused, sipping his glass of wine.

“As do I,” he agreed. “She immersed herself in American culture when we first arrived here from Italy. When I was taking classes in college, she roamed as far away from me as she could. She listened in on girl-talk in the hallways, and she sat through Women’s Study courses that piqued her interests. She loved American slang, and she still does. She caught on so quickly with it, and I confess not even I invested myself as much as she has.”

“She’s a hip ghost,” Will laughed. “It’s incredible.”

“The nineties were the worse,” Hannibal chuckled. “She’d call men scrubs and tell me to, and I quote, ‘talk to the hand.’”

Will laughed, “Cause the ears ain’t listening,” he finished, making Hannibal roll his eyes in amusement.

“Precisely,” he laughed, shaking his head. “She’s been a learning curve. She’s kept me honest.”

“It shocked the shit out of me when she called me a snack,” Will laughed. “She’s one of a kind.”

“I have to admit I don’t really understand what that means,” Hannibal admitted. “Though I have an idea.”

“I’m sure you do,” Will blushed.

“Looks good enough to eat?” Hannibal teased, making Will’s lovely blush spread down to the pale expanse of his throat.

“Jesus,” Will laughed awkwardly. “Yeah. That’s what it means.”

“Then I agree with her entirely,” he said boldly.

Will bit his lip, fighting back a grin. “I don’t do well with compliments.”

“Evidently,” Hannibal agreed. “It’s charming.”

“*Charming*,” Will repeated in disbelief, spearing another bite of his dinner. “Not something I’ve ever been accused of being.”

“Ever?” This time, Hannibal was in disbelief.

“Ever,” Will confirmed with a nod. “Quirky, weird, quiet, shy, awkward… those are the usual comments about me. Charming?” he snorted. “Never.”

“People are idiots,” Hannibal shrugged.

Will’s laugh was vibrant, and it made Hannibal smile in response. “Yeah,” he agreed. “They are.”

They finished their dinners, and the waiter came over to ask if they’d like a dessert menu. Will jumped on it, nodding his head. A sweet tooth, then. It made Hannibal smile.

“You want to share one?” he asked brightly.

“I am quite full,” Hannibal admitted. “Please. Get whatever you’d like. I might steal a bite.”

“Cheesecake?” Will asked, licking his lips at the very thought.

“Perfect,” he agreed.

The slice came out almost immediately, and Will popped the strawberry in his mouth the moment the plate was set down. The pleased little moan that echoed from his mouth at the first bite of cheesecake made Hannibal close his eyes, as the visual of Will sliding his fork out of his mouth combined with the sound was just too much at one time.

“What made you decide to teach, Will? How did you end up in your profession?”

Will licked the fork, completely unaware of the fire he was setting to Hannibal’s insides. “My uncle was a cop,” he said with a shrug. “I was very little when he’d come over, and I remember thinking that he was so important. His uniform. The belt filled with tools and things that I didn’t understand, really. I looked up to him, and… I don’t know. After high school I went to the police academy in New Orleans. I was a homicide cop there for two years. My gift made it so easy to put scenes together, and… my solve-rate was incredible. I

got into Washington University for Criminal Psychology, then applied to Quantico. I was turned down from the FBI, though. My evaluation determined that I was not fit to be a field agent."

"Is that not what you do, now?" Hannibal asked in confusion.

"I am a special agent," he chuckled ruefully. "I have a consultation agreement with them, but I am not an agent. They… utilize me and my abilities. I teach there because I needed supplemental income to survive. It worked out because I genuinely love teaching the students. I'm hard on them, but their careers will be much worse."

"You've had a very busy career as well, then," he realized. "You're barely thirty and you've accomplished so much."

Will choked on the bite of his cheesecake, glancing up at Hannibal with a raised eyebrow. "I'm thirty-four," he corrected. "How old did you *think* I was?"

Alana. Why was she the way that she was? "I was under the misapprehension that you were thirty, or just about to be. You look very young for your age. I'd put you in your twenties."

"I have a baby face," he grimaced. "It's why I keep the stubble. I guess it doesn't work the way I think it does."

So there was six years between them. Not that the four years was an impasse, but it made Hannibal feel marginally better that he wasn't pursuing a twenty-something.

It was high time to cut Alana Bloom from his life. If he did not have his sister, he would mean it quite literally.

"Your sister is the reason you left surgery, isn't she?"

The question was so shockingly random and on the nose that Hannibal almost choked on his wine. "Well," he said clearing his throat. "Yes. In a way. It was very difficult to concentrate with her in the room. The long hours bored her to tears. She was at her most irritable in that time of my life. She threw tantrums and broke things. I decided to do something different because it wasn't fair to her. My life, for some reason or another, is tethered to hers. She shouldn't suffer because I make all the decisions for the both of us."

"It was… it was your calling though," Will said softly. "You loved it."

"I did," he agreed, glancing away from the intensity in Will's eyes. "I love her more, though. My practice grants me the opportunity to make my own hours. I can spend more time with her at night and take her places when she grows restless. It's better for the both of us."

"It's better for her," Will pointed out. "You've given up a lot, Hannibal. I know neither of you expected this, and I know you wouldn't want to lose her for anything. It doesn't change the fact that you gave up something you loved, something that gave you purpose in life, to better her afterlife."

“Never speak of this to her, please,” Hannibal asked softly. “I don’t want her to ever feel guilty.”

“I would never,” Will promised.

The bill came shortly afterwards, and just as Hannibal was reaching into his pocket for his wallet, Will slid a card over to the waiter before he even left the table. “I asked you to dinner,” Hannibal blurted, utterly shocked.

“Yeah,” Will sighed, reaching over the table for his hand again. “I am so glad you did, too.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, still baffled. No one had ever paid for him when he went out on dates. No one.

“Any time,” Will said, smiling wide. “Seriously. Any time.”

He walked Will to his car, where they both lingered close by one another. “I want to take Mischa into a haunted house this week,” Will told him. “What day works best for you?”

“I am free any day after four,” he said hesitantly. “Do you really think that’s a good idea?”

“They can’t kill her,” Will mused, making Hannibal laugh.

“True enough,” he shrugged. “She’s in the Middle Place. When she returns to me, I’ll call and let you know what day works best for us.”

“Perfect,” Will nodded.

“Since you’re in Baltimore, we could finish our evening at my home,” Hannibal offered. “I have a single-malt scotch that I think you’d like.”

Will tipped his head, stepping into Hannibal’s space to tug him close by the lapels of his coat. The scent of his minty curls teased Hannibal’s nose, and he closed his eyes as Will tipped his face up for a kiss.

The soft slide of their lips was sensuous, the sweet, lush, feel of Will’s tongue gently sampling Hannibal’s mouth the very essence of addictive. He could not recall the last time he *wanted* someone like this, and the thought alarmed him. There was no sense in getting attached to him, as-

The thought abruptly scattered when Will bit down on his bottom lip, flicking the soft flesh with the tip of his tongue. Will knew everything about his life situation, and he was still here. Still kissing him.

Still interested.

Will understood him. The first living person to do so since he’d been a young boy. He grasped the nape of Will’s neck, licking into his sweet mouth with vigor. The softest little

moan rumbled from Will's throat, and he pulled away, cheeks flushed and eyes half-lidded.

That clever pink tongue swiped his lips, wetting them enough that Hannibal considered kissing him again. "If I come for a drink," he said lowly, voice gritty and deep. "I won't leave. I'm going to kiss you again, probably in your study. I'll end up loosening this tie to get my mouth against your throat, and you'll thread your fingers through my hair. The next thing I know, I'll be in your bed."

"Is that so terrible?" Hannibal asked, lifting his mouth in a teasing grin.

"I'm not ready for that yet," he admitted. "I am, and I'm not. Intimacy is… difficult for me. I feel *everything*. What my partner feels for me, and how I feel for them. I pick up the hidden motive behind every action, and I know when someone's bored with what I'm doing. This has been so fucking perfect, Hannibal. I'm not ready to ruin it with sex, yet."

It had never occurred to him that Will's gift would taint his intimacy in that way. His desire for solitude suddenly made perfect sense, and he stepped away. "Would you see me again? Haunted houses aside?"

"Obviously," Will laughed, tugging him in for a chaste kiss that curled Hannibal's toes. "Sooner rather than later, preferably."

"I'm glad to hear it," Hannibal said, relieved. "Thank you for dinner. And for your exceptional company."

Will rolled his eyes fondly. "Any time. For either. Have a good night, Hannibal."

Unable to resist, he pressed another kiss, but to the soft skin of Will's flushed cheek this time. "Good night, Will."

He watched Will drive away before heading to his own car, a silly grin stretching the corners of his mouth.

Chapter End Notes

AND they've been out to dinner on a date! AND THEY'RE DATING! And Alana is a meddling bitch after-all, lmao.

Next chapter is so much fun, and a little heart-wrenching. This fic toes that line, haha.

IF you're enjoying, press that kudos button and leave me sugar. It makes me happy! <33

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

New Chapter coming EARLY because I am about to have a super busy weekend and I think the next post will be Monday! Sorry guys.

ALSO TRIGGER WARNING HERE:

They visit a haunted house this chapter, and there are ghosts of kids that have been killed over 100 years ago. NOTHING graphic though, promise.

ALSO small TW for a discussion about Will's dad, and homophobia. Just in case that subject matter hits a little too close to home. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monday went by without incident, and without Mischa's return as well. He used the free time to go to his gym after work, lifting weights, then doing laps in the pool. His evening was quiet, just himself and a book that he'd been reading.

She manifested on Tuesday morning, just as he was sitting down with his first appointment of the day. 'That took a lot out of me!' she said immediately, pursing her lips as she realized where she was, and the time of day. 'Why do I always come back right as you're about to work?'

"How have things been, Daniel?" Hannibal asked, ignoring her presence for the time being.

"My wife left me," he said immediately, clenching his jaw to prevent tears. He clearly had not been sleeping, judging by the gauntness of his face as well as the circles under his eyes. "Said she was tired of me cheating on her. I cheat because… because we have no connection anymore!"

'Oh brother,' Mischa sighed, gliding off towards his desk.

"A connection can be difficult to maintain if there is infidelity," Hannibal said reasonably. He watched Mischa glow bright from the corner of his eye, and his mouth fell open as she shoved his planner to the floor.

Daniel jumped, coming to his feet at the echoing sound of leather slapping the floor. "The fuck was that? How did that… how did that fall to the floor?"

'Oops,' Mischa giggled. Hannibal shook his head at her as discretely as he could, trying desperately to think of something.

“I don’t think I set that on the desk fully,” he explained slowly, making Daniel huff a breath before sitting back down in the leather chair. “I apologize if it frightened you.”

‘Wuss,’ Mischa laughed.

“S’fine,” he shrugged, glancing off towards the planner with a frown. “I only cheated on her one time before… well, she pulled away from me. I said I was sorry!”

It was people like Daniel that Hannibal wanted to cut into from stem to stern, but Mischa’s sweet face looking at him in amused disgust made him refrain from taking his letter opener and doing so. “Daniel, we discussed this last session,” he said patiently.

“Trust is earned,” he said monotonously, bobbing his leg in anxiety. “Actions speak louder than *words*.”

“Precisely. I realize it can be difficult to-”

There was a crash behind him, his pen holder falling to the floor in a clatter. Daniel yelped, jumping to his feet again to run to the door. “What’s going on?” he asked in a panic. “Are you… are you *messing* with me? Testing my paranoia?”

“It’s an old building,” he said, glaring at Mischa with his back turned away from his patient. She at least had the good sense to look contrite. “The floors aren’t quite even. I apologize.”

“No,” he said, voice rising in panic. “What if… what if my infidelity has brought… a- a *demon* for me! Adultery is a *sin*, Doctor Lecter!”

“Daniel,” he said patiently, doing his utmost best not to sigh. “There is no demon. You are not being punished for your infidelity by a higher power. Think rationally, please.”

He watched in abject horror as Mischa intentionally passed directly through him, making him shiver with wide eyes. “I feel *cold*!” he said, voice aquiver. Mischa laughed from behind him, throwing the tissue box off the table so it glanced off his legs.

Daniel must have jumped three feet before screaming bloody murder.

Hannibal called out to him as he bolted from the office, the door slamming from the jam in his haste. He turned a glare on Mischa, who looked immensely proud. ‘He was a *dick*. 'I can't keep it in my pants and it's my wife's fault! Boo-hoo!'’

“He is my patient,” he said, closing the door before rounding on her. “Mischa, you cannot do this. This is my *profession*. It’s… it’s how I afford to take care of myself. It’s how I take care of us.”

‘You have your inheritance,’ she pointed out ruefully. ‘Or do you forget about that?’

“I need to stay busy,” he sighed. “I cannot just… idle through life. Do this for me. Please?”

‘I’d do anything for you,’ she said dejectedly, floating off towards the window. ‘I wanted to show you that I don’t disappear when I move little things anymore.’

“I can see that,” he said drolly. “Do not do it in anyone but Will’s presence again. Do you understand?”

‘I understand,’ she said softly. ‘How was your date?’

“It was absolutely perfect,” he admitted, allowing the smallest hint of his smile to prove it. “We’d both like to see one another again.”

‘I’d like to see him!’

“He’d like that too, I imagine. He wanted to see if you were serious about visiting that old house on Ashmore Street.”

‘Oh!’ she chirped. ‘Yeah. Ghost Hunters: Ghost Edition! I’m down.’

“I’ll call and see if tonight works for him, once my appointments are finished for the day.”

‘I will be *perfect* the rest of the day, brother-mine, promise,’ she said solemnly, twirling her hair over her shoulder in a perfect imitation of how she used to do it when she was small.

She knew how to play him, he’d give her that. “I hope you will be.”

Will agreed to meet them at Ashmore House at six that evening, and with the promise of seeing him, his day dragged at a snail’s pace. Mischa at least was at her best behavior, silent and still for the remainder of the day.

The sun was just setting as they pulled up the over-grown driveway at six, the old house in front of them on the verge of collapse. ‘This is amazing,’ Mischa giggled, gliding down the driveway while twirling. ‘This house looks like it’s haunted. It’s… *movie quality* haunted.’

The house was situated in the outskirts of Virginia. The huge lot surrounding the property was over-grown and unattended. The driveway itself was cracked, weeds and small trees poking through the broken concrete.

Hannibal eyed the steps of the house warily, uncertain if the home was safe for he and Will to enter at *all*. The front windows were broken in some spots, haphazardly boarded up with old, splintered wood. A frayed and willowy curtain blew out from the broken glass, what was once white lace, now frayed and brown shreds. The roof looked decrepit; the siding even worse. There wasn’t an inch of the home from the exterior that didn’t need attention.

He assumed that the only reason the house was allowed to rot this way was because there were no neighbors within eyesight of it. He knew that he himself would have complained if there was a home by his own that existed in such a state.

Will’s Volvo pulled in while he assessed the risk of entering such a ruined home. “Hey,” he said with a wide smile, eyes fixed pointedly on the house in front of them. His smile drifted from his face, and he shivered. “They *already* know we’re here.”

“Who?” Hannibal asked.

‘Them,’ Mischa said, pointing up at the window with wide eyes. ‘Hi!’ she called up with a smile. ‘My name is Mischa!’

Will swallowed, turning to Hannibal warily. “It might be best if we don’t go in.”

‘They don’t want you in there,’ Mischa agreed with a nod, though she looked nonplussed. ‘Can they stay here? They’re my ride.’ Whatever was said in response made Mischa nod, and she drifted up the steps.

“Wait,” Hannibal said, anxiety rising. “Can they hurt her? Will they?”

‘They’re not going to hurt me,’ she laughed. ‘You hear this guy?’ she asked, smiling up at the windows.

With that, she drifted through the wall and into the house. Away from Hannibal’s sight.

“What did they say when they saw us?” Hannibal asked numbly.

Will laced his fingers between Hannibal’s own, steeling him with his resolve. “Get *out*,” he said softly, eyes utterly haunted while staring at the window. “Get out, *get out*. You don’t belong here. Get out.”

“Not friendly,” Hannibal shivered.

“They’re…” Will swallowed. “They sound very young. They sound... *afraid*.”

“Do you know the history of this home?” Hannibal wondered.

Will shook his head. “I know what everyone knows. The last person that lived here, as well as the three families before them, all left within weeks of moving in. The last time it was lived in for more than a month was in 1913. Edison Grey. The last three families had stories that ranged from the house being haunted, to the house being cursed. They filmed an episode of ‘Ghost Hunters’ here, but… they decided that it wasn’t haunted.”

“That show…” Hannibal chucked. “I wouldn’t trust their judgment for anything, I don’t think.”

Will smiled ruefully, still watching the house with dark eyes that sparkled in the low light of sunset. “Is it weird that I’m worried for her?”

“A bit,” Hannibal admitted, reaching out thoughtlessly to drag the back of his fingers against his flawless jawline. It brought Will’s attention back to him, those intensely intelligent eyes picking him apart instead of the house. “Is it strange that… that I find her… situation to be a relief, on occasion?”

The smile he got in response was wistful. “You don’t have to worry about her anymore,” he said softly. “No one can hurt her. She… she can’t be killed again. It’s not strange at all.”

Of course, Will understood him. It was more surprising that Hannibal doubted he would at this point. “Can you hear them?”

Will shook his head, then shrugged. “A bit? It’s like… when the radio is on two different stations. I can’t make sense of it. They're too far away from me.”

“Have you never seen them?”

Again, Will shook his head. “The first time I’ve ever… was the photo of Mischa that I took. Although you said that’s not how you see her?”

“I see her as herself,” Hannibal replied. “Paler. It’s like… the substance that makes her is now suspended on dust particles. Light goes through her. Her edges aren’t… solid. It’s very difficult to explain.”

“You’re doing just fine,” Will said, smiling softly. “When she first appeared to you, did she understand what… what happened to her?”

“She was only six,” Hannibal said softly, allowing Will to take his hand when he reached for it. “I woke that morning, much colder than usual. It took me quite a while to realize that she… she wasn’t coughing. She wasn’t… rasping, as she had begun to do when she breathed. The first thing I thought about when I woke up was that I was still so very tired. I hadn’t eaten in days. She was still and silent next to me, and… for a brief moment, I thought her silence meant that she had gotten better.”

“Oh Hannibal,” Will sighed. He stepped into Hannibal’s space, pressing him close against his chest. It wasn’t very cold outside, as it was just the early days of crisp autumn weather. Still, he felt the reassuring body heat from the other man soaking into his skin, reassuring him.

Without conscious thought, his arms went around Will, holding him close. Gently. Carefully. Keeping something precious safe from harm, unlike that horrible morning thirty years ago. “I tried to rouse her and noticed… she was very rigid. When I moved her little body, her limbs stayed locked in place. The stone-like peace on her face. The way her hair stayed golden and warm even in death… those memories stay in my nightmares, even to this day.”

“Had the… the men that broke into your home already left?” he asked, warm breath ghosting across his throat.

“No,” he replied tightly. “They came in to offer meager scraps from their breakfast. When they realized she was dead… they dropped the plate and ran. They left me there, my body tied to her corpse. My leg tied to the bedpost. She appeared to me merely moments after they left. She said I needed to live for her. I needed to survive this for her, and… I did. I broke my thumbs wiggling my hands free. I thought she was a shade, then. Something my subconscious conjured as a last ditch means for survival. She stayed, though. She screamed when I almost fell asleep in the snow while walking to the town for help. She made me talk to her, even as my body tried to give out. She got me to a townhouse a mile and a half away from the estate, where a local couple tended to me until I was well enough to be brought to the local orphanage.”

Will said nothing when he finished speaking, and for that Hannibal was grateful. His presence was enough. The warmth of his embrace felt like the exact balm needed to soothe the raw edges of his anguish. He'd never told a soul what happened to him, and he never thought he ever would.

The sun set behind them, and Will pulled away to look up at him in the milky twilight. His eyes were glassy, the shine on them making them look like gemstones. "Tell me something about yourself," Hannibal pleaded, desperate to know anything about the intriguing man. "Anything."

"Tit for tat?" Will asked, the corners of his mouth lifting in a hesitant smile.

"Naturally."

Will glanced away for a moment, considering what to say. His tongue wetted his lips, and all Hannibal wanted in that moment was to taste them. "I grew up in the bible belt of the south," he said softly, his face tight with something Hannibal couldn't name. "I've known I liked men and women since I was… probably fourteen. I was attracted to both sexes. I knew it, but… I never acted on it. My dad passed ten years ago, liver failure. With his passing, I decided that I wanted to live for myself, and not for anyone else. I had… I had a one-night stand with a guy. Not even sex, just… well," he blushed, dipping his face down to hide it. "After he left, I was… excited. I could finally pursue relationships that I wanted. It was that night that my dad popped in to say something to me. The first and only time he's ever done so."

"What did he say?" Hannibal asked, keeping him close by threading his fingers through soft curls.

"That he was ashamed," Will said brokenly, voice thick with emotion. "That I should be, too."

"Will," Hannibal sighed, tugging him in for another embrace.

He didn't relax into it, however. Strong arms barricaded him from tugging him close, and sharp eyes watched him fiercely even as they glistened with unshed tears. "I am not ashamed, Hannibal," he said sharply. "I will never be ashamed of who I am. I told him that if he felt that way, then he could fuck off to hell. People always think that when you die, the best parts of you move onto the next world, only. He was proof that... that all of a person moves on. He was still a self-righteous dick even after he died, and I hated him for it. I hate him for coming to me just to tell me that he is ashamed of who I am."

"Who you are is nothing scarce of perfection, Will Graham," he replied, shaking his head at the audacity of his father, even after he'd died. "The only people who should feel shame are the ones that try to shame others."

"Yeah," Will agreed thickly, grasping Hannibal's coat in his clutching fingers. "It doesn't change that his words have stayed with me through every rancid attempt at a relationship that I've ever taken. I've never felt… good about seeing another man. There's always been some

measure of guilt involved, whether I want there to be or not. Until *you*. I feel like… like I've been *waiting* for you. Does it feel as right to you as it does to me?"

"Yes," Hannibal agreed easily. "I've waited my entire life for you. If all you want from me is friendship, Will, I can do that. I just… want you in my life. I realize it's soon to say something like that, but it is no less the truth."

"I don't want to be your *friend*, Hannibal," Will said ruefully, licking his lips while staring at Hannibal's own. "I want so much more. I want to see our potential. I don't feel shame about the thoughts I have for you. I don't feel guilt. I don't think you understand how monumental that is, but I felt the need to tell you. I'm… *proud* to have you. Unless… unless I'm being really fucking clingy by assuming that I have you?"

"No," Hannibal laughed, leaning forward to kiss the ridiculous man. Will's mouth parted against his immediately, and the aggressive thrust of his sweet tongue as he clung to Hannibal's shoulders felt possessive and unbearably perfect. Hannibal wrapped his arms around his narrow waist, hauling his body flush against his own. His ran his fingers through thick curls, savoring the heady taste of Will on his tongue.

Will pulled away abruptly, a sharp wail escaping his mouth as he turned back to the house. "Something's happening," he said, stepping away from Hannibal to dash up the stairs. Hannibal followed him into the darkened house, where bright light seemed to pour out from the very cracks of the walls.

"Mischa?" Hannibal called out, wincing as the pure white light intensified, a low hum that reminded Hannibal of the sound of electrical wires buzzing through his ears. "*Mischa*!"

Will collapsed to the floor, covering his ears with his eyes closed. Hannibal went to him, desperate to protect what was his at all costs. He covered Will with his body, shielding him from whatever might happen.

The thrum disappeared instantly along with the blinding light, the abrupt change in the atmosphere making Hannibal's ears pop and ring.

'Dramatic much?' Mischa giggled from their side.

He uncurled from Will's body, releasing him from his protective hold. Will was shivering, so he untied his jacket and wrapped the smaller man in the warm fabric while pulling him to his feet. Will held onto him desperately, clawing his fingers into his back to keep him close. "They're gone?" Will asked softly.

'Yeah,' Mischa sighed. 'Dr. Grey lived here a while back. He killed four kids in the basement, the sicko. They've been stuck here in a limbo for a while. Poor things were afraid of people.'

"Why have they moved on?" Hannibal asked warily, glancing around the house. With the blinding light gone, the darkness of the house felt like it was encroaching into his soul.

‘I told them they had to,’ Mischa shrugged. ‘I said that no one that’s lived here wanted to hurt them, and that their parents were likely looking for them in the afterlife. They could barely remember their parents, so we got to talking about them, and then… I don’t know. It’s like they were kids again. Like nothing bad had happened to them. They went from looking how they did the moment they died to how they should have looked as healthy little kids. Then… then they were fading. It felt like sunlight to be in that light. Did you see it?’

Hannibal swallowed thickly, wishing he could take her in his arms and keep her to himself. “We saw it,” he agreed.

‘I haven’t felt warmth in *decades*,’ she sighed. ‘It was lovely, Hannibal.

“Don’t leave,” he blurted, staring at her as though she were about to disappear in the sunlight she liked so much. “Stay with me, sunshine.”

‘Brother-mine,’ she grinned, twirling in the shadows of the decrepit house. ‘Where else would I go?’

She followed them out of the house, talking endlessly about the kids she’d met. She knew their names, the names of their siblings, the names of their parents. She seemed to know everything about them, despite only being in the house for about forty minutes.

Will still looked shaken, his face pale as snow. “Are you alright?” he asked by Will’s car.

“Did you… did you hear them?” Will asked, glancing up at Hannibal hopefully. “The people on the other side of the light. Did you hear all of them?”

‘Their families,’ Mischa said with a pleased sigh. ‘They came to get them.’

“I heard… a thrumming buzz,” he said hesitantly. “It was like electricity. I didn’t hear voices, however.”

Will took a deep breath, steadying himself by leaning against his car. ‘You helped them, Will,’ Mischa said encouragingly. ‘They’ve been stuck forever, and you helped them.’

“*You* helped them,” Will said adamantly, shaking his head with a gentle smile. “You did, Mischa. I might’ve suggested you come, but… they listened to *you*. They spoke to you. You did this. You deserve something special, though I can’t think of anything I could give you,” he laughed.

‘Watch the new episode of Game of Thrones with me!’ she said excitedly. ‘I haven’t seen it yet!’

“I have to get home to my dogs,” he said apologetically. “If Hannibal doesn’t mind coming to my house, we could watch it there?”

“I have no objections to that,” he grinned, leaning forward to press a kiss against Will’s temple. “Are you alright to drive?”

“I’m fine, Hannibal,” he promised.

He couldn’t explain how *right* it felt to move around Will’s small kitchen, plating some dinner for the both of them. The smell of roasted chicken and vegetables permeated every inch of Will’s home, the sounds of happy dog paws clicking against the wood flooring. Will and Mischa were in the living room, having a heated debate over who Jon Snow’s mother was.

He brought their plates into the living room, settling with Will on his small bed to eat while Mischa slumped to the floor, surrounded by dogs she couldn’t touch. Will pressed a thankful kiss to his mouth before digging in, pressing ‘play’ for the episode.

It felt like being a part of an honest-to-God family. The two of them hummed through the theme-song, Mischa giggling madly when Will’s hum turned into a ridiculous song. He laughed at her giggle, relaxing against Hannibal’s shoulder while cutting into his chicken breast.

Hannibal wanted this for the rest of his life. He wanted every night to be just this; his two favorite people in the world, Will’s dogs, and vibrant laughter in his ears.

Chapter End Notes

Mischa is a badass, isn't she? and We're just hitting the top of the iceberg of her badassery.

For those who have been waiting patiently for some smut, next chapter is for you. For those who do NOT want to read heavy smut, I'll mark off with + & - signs so you can skip the especially dirty bits. Some people have bookmarked my work, and put summaries like, 'smut is skippable' and 'goes smutty and downhill eventually.'

I don't know how to tell you this, but your bookmark summaries can be seen by authors. I USED TO enjoy writing smutty things, but I feel weirdly self-conscious about it, now. So thanks for that.

For everyone else that's been kind and amazing, I have written some smut for this story. It feels like it's missing something, but I tried. haha.
Thank you for your comments and kudos. They help combat the small feeling I get when I read something hateful. Love you guys. <3

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

EARLY gift for you guys!

WARNING: there be smut ahead. I've denoted the sexy times by putting a - sign when it starts, and a + sign when it ends. If you don't want to read it, search '+' and find the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was exhausted the next day, as he and Mischa hadn't gotten home until after two in the morning. The evening was worth his exhaustion, though. Mischa had winked into the Middle Place, giving he and Will a few minutes of privacy before he left.

Will kissed him with complete and utter abandon, licking into his mouth while Hannibal pressed him against his front door. Will's lithe body arched against him, one leg raising up to Hannibal's hip while their mouths clashed and devoured one another. Without thought, he grasped Will's leg and hauled him up, grinding against the heat and length of Will's arousal while the younger man wrapped his legs around Hannibal's waist.

The soft grunt of pleasure that rumbled from Will's throat as he ground against him, panting into his mouth, made Hannibal hard just thinking about it.

Which wasn't a good thing, given his whereabouts. He blinked, shifting one leg carefully over the other while his patient droned on and on about her mother, completely unaware of how her therapist's thoughts had wandered.

Thank goodness for small favors.

The encounter lasted all of ten minutes before Will's legs dropped back down to the floor, each of them still hard and aching as they regained their breath. "When can I see you next?" Will had rasped, sucking the skin of his throat between his lips while his hands grasped and pulled Hannibal closer.

"Tomorrow," Hannibal begged, tipping his head back to make room for Will's hot mouth. "Later today, I mean."

Will chuckled wickedly, reaching between their bodies to stroke his cock through his slacks. His hips thrust pathetically into his hand, a soft moan of approval echoing between them. "I have to let you leave, don't I?" he said breathlessly, spreading his legs enough that he could rut himself against Hannibal's thigh.

"You don't," he reasoned. "You could keep me here. *All* yours," he said, tilting Will's face up to trail kisses down the flawless expanse of his throat. His skin was soft as silk and smelled

divine. He licked boldly, savoring the salty flavor of his skin on his tongue.

The possessive growl from Will went straight to his cock, which he ground into Will's palm desperately. Eventually, hands slid off to hips, then hips backed away to a more respectable distance. They were both still aroused, still interested. Hannibal was trying to be respectful of his plea for a slow pace, but the stubborn man kept kissing him and pressing against him, shredding his restraint to tatters.

They eventually parted ways, deliciously rumpled and kiss bitten. Will watched him pull out from the driveway, leaning against the railing of the porch with his dogs around his legs. Leaving him there felt like he was leaving a part of himself behind. Something he'd never encountered before.

"It's like she wants to run my life, and I need my space from her. I'm about to move across the country without telling her a thing!" his patient said passionately.

He cleared his throat, focusing on her instead of his lingering thoughts on the beautiful man that had invaded them. "Have you spoken to her about having you followed?" he said finally.

"No," she sighed. "I know she does it because she loves me, I just don't know how-"

'Sometimes I wish people could see or hear me,' Mischa said by his side, manifesting very quickly after moving a dining chair again last night. 'Those kids talked about their mothers for near-on an hour, too. But for them, it was how much they missed them.'

"It's something that needs to be addressed," Hannibal said to his patient. "I've told you that you could invite her to a session with me, so we could discuss the issues in a clinical setting."

'No one just *talks* to each other anymore,' Mischa sighed.

"She won't come," his patient griped. "I know her, Dr. Lecter. She doesn't even think *I* should come. She thinks it's inappropriate that I tell a stranger all of my problems."

'Honey, I'm dead! Mommy issues are the *least* of your problems!'

"Make it a request from me, instead," Hannibal offered. "I think a session with the two of you would benefit you both."

"My boyfriend left me because of her," she said miserably. "She paid a private detective to follow him around like a shadow, gathering every dirty thing from his past-"

'Ooh!' Mischa chirped. 'Like *what*? Ask her what, Han!'

"No one will date me if my mom keeps hiring people to dig up their lives and follow them around!"

"As I've said," Hannibal said patiently, swiping a few fingers under his sleep-deprived eyes. "You must speak with her, and I think speaking with her in a therapy session would be best. Her behavior won't change unless you encourage it to."

She was the last appointment of his long, long, day, and her hour was thankfully up. “Gwen, that’s our hour. I will once again ask you to request your mother’s presence here with us next week. Will you do that?”

She sighed, leg bouncing in anxiety. “Yeah. Sure. She might want to speak with you. Is it alright if I give her your number?”

“Of course,” he nodded. “Until next week, Gwen. If she agrees to come, please bring her. No phone call is necessary. Alright?”

She stood up, brushing her fingers over her pencil skirt primly. “Alright. Thank you, Dr. Lecter.”

He showed her out, and Mischa whistled. ‘You should have encouraged her to move cross-country,’ Mischa laughed.

“Indeed,” he sighed, moving automatically towards his dry bar for a drink. Just as he was about to pour one for himself, there was a knock at the door.

Mischa breezed through it, squeaking in delight. He pulled the door open to find Will shivering on the other side, a gentle smile on his face. “Your sister breezed right through me,” he laughed.

‘By accident! Consider it like a hug!’

“Are you with a patient?” he asked, eyebrows lifting hopefully.

“Last appointment of the day left ten minutes ago,” Hannibal said, waving him in. “Come in, darling.”

Will didn’t just come in, he stepped into Hannibal’s space and kissed him like he hadn't done so in years. ‘Okay,’ Mischa sighed. ‘Be back in a few minutes!’

She popped out from this plane just as Hannibal tugged Will inside to close the door, never parting from his mouth for a moment. Hannibal trailed his mouth down the lovely column of his throat, and Will moaned. “I thought about you all day,” he gasped, back arching enough that he pressed against Hannibal fully. “*All* day,” he sighed.

“Likewise,” he replied between gentle nips of Will’s skin. His body was a perfect thing under his hands; hard muscle that still gave when squeezed in his palms. He was wearing a soft gray sweater that made his eyes look like cold steel, the fabric not doing a thing to hide how beautiful his body was underneath it. “You are driving me to distraction, Will.”

“I got hard while lecturing about suck bruises,” he chided, “because you’ve got a fetish about my neck.”

“I most certainly do,” he agreed, nibbling on said neck with gentle, open-mouthed kisses that would not bruise, unlike the one he’d given Will the night before.

“Hannibal,” he whined. Strong hands slipped into his hair while he licked into Hannibal’s mouth, each stumbling back from the door with their hands full of the other.

Will pulled away with a sharp gasp, his breathing uneven. His head tipped to the side as if he were listening to someone, which might be likely, given his gift. Hannibal watched the various emotions play out across his face, taking in each detail so he might recall it later with a sketchpad. He was a beauty.

He gave Will some space, but Will grasped his blazer in his fingers, his eyes snapping up to meet Hannibal’s own. “She *can’t* come for an appointment with… with… Gwendolyn,” he said uncertainly. “She has been dead for ten years, and her daughter needs help. She *needs* you to know that she needs help.”

Hannibal’s mouth fell open in shock, iced water moving through his veins. Could this be considered a breach of doctor-patient confidentiality? He seriously had no idea. Gwen’s mother was dead and had been for *ten years*.

Which meant that everything that had gone wrong in Gwen’s life was done by Gwen herself.

It changed everything he thought he knew about his patient, including how he’d been treating her. “I will help her, Evelyn,” he promised softly, the hairs on his neck standing up. “I promise.”

Will’s eyes closed while he nodded, his throat constricting with a swallow. “I’m sorry,” he sighed.

“Don’t be,” he said, hauling Will close to press a kiss against his temple. “Never be sorry, Will. You’re incredible.”

Will laughed ruefully, resting his forehead against Hannibal’s shoulder. “I came here to make-out with my… well,”

“Boyfriend?” Hannibal wondered, kissing his cheek.

“Yeah,” he agreed with a sigh. “Dead people find me everywhere, I guess.”

Just as he said it, his phone rang. The noise made him deflate even further as he withdrew it from his pocket. “It’s Jack,” he sighed. “I will probably have to leave.”

He answered the call, and Hannibal watched his shoulders hunch, tension rising in him with each word Jack said over the phone. “Sure,” he said with a sigh. “Text me the address, I’ll be right there.”

The call ended, and Will turned to him with an apologetic expression. “I started something here that I can’t finish,” he sighed. “There’s a body, and I’ve got to go.”

“Would you like me to come with you?” he asked, pressing his thumbs into Will’s shoulders to work the tension out from them. Will relaxed minutely under his attention, but he shook his head.

“I haven’t spoken with Jack about you yet,” he confessed, turning in Hannibal’s arms to look up at him. “I’ll talk to him today, though.”

“If you need someone to talk to, come to me afterwards, please. My door is always open for you. I’ll be home, and there will be a hot meal should you want it.”

“Jesus,” Will breathed, going up on his toes to press a kiss to Hannibal’s cheek. “You’re fucking perfect, aren’t you? I think… I think I will come by? I don’t know how late I’ll be.”

“However late it is, it’s no imposition,” he promised. “Take care of yourself, darling.”

Will nodded, mouth lifting in a smile as Hannibal leaned in to kiss him chastely.

Mischa returned to him just as he was making dinner, floating into the kitchen while glancing around. ‘He’s not here?’ she asked dejectedly.

“They needed him at a crime scene,” he informed her, chopping onions for his stir-fry. “He’s coming afterwards.”

‘You like him, huh?’ she asked knowingly, a teasing little smile on her face.

“I should think that much is very obvious,” he agreed. “I’d like to talk to you about what happened last night, however.”

‘What about?’

“When the light came,” he said anxiously. “You said you felt the warmth of it, and that you liked it. Did you feel… that pull you said happens?”

‘Kind of?’ she shrugged. ‘Not like the gut-pulling tug I felt when I was little, but… a little bit. That light wasn’t for me, Hannibal. It was for the kids. It was all their families, all their loved ones. It had nothing to do with me, and… I don’t know, I guess I felt envious about that. The light was so warm, brother-mine. Like heat if heat were able to carry pleasant emotions inside of it. Warmth that promises peace and joy. It’s very difficult to explain.’

“Do…” his voice broke, so he averted his eyes to the counter. “Do you wish you could leave me, sunshine?”

‘Never,’ she promised. ‘I have eternity. I can wait for you. I *want* to wait for you. We’ll go to Mama and Papa together.’

“I wouldn’t fault you,” he promised her softly. “I want you to be happy. I’ve always only ever wanted your happiness.”

‘That’s the problem,’ she sighed. ‘I *am* happy, Hannibal. It’s time you started doing things that made *you* happy, too.’

Hannibal said nothing in response to that, as he felt perfectly content in his life. Even more-so now that he'd met Will. 'Like Will,' she continued, waggling her delicate eyebrows at him. 'I'm gonna make myself scarce when he gets here, and you're going to get that gorgeous man into bed.'

"Mischa," he grimaced, "please."

'What?' she asked indignantly. 'I might be dead, but I have eyes! I'm not a prude, and you shouldn't be, either. That man seriously likes you, and he can't keep his eyes or his mouth off you. Give him some sugar, Han.'

He loved her. Truly, he did. Sometimes though, he wished he could pop over into the Middle Place himself, just for some privacy.

"I will never discuss any… *sugar* with you, darling," he said adamantly. "Some things should remain private, don't you think?"

'You won't feel that way when you're dead,' she shrugged, gliding off toward the foyer. 'I'm going to watch some tv, k?'

"Do as you please," he said, moving to continue cooking dinner. She no longer needed him to put the television on, nor change the channel for her. "Keep the volume low!" he called out to her.

Just as he was covering their dinner to keep it warm, the doorbell rang.

Will looked… shaken, and Hannibal ushered him into the house before wrapping him in his arms. "It was bad," he said softly, holding Hannibal tight. "Bad."

"You don't need to speak of it," Hannibal assured him softly. "Not unless you want to."

"It's getting harder and harder for me to look," Will gasped. "I don't know if I can keep doing this."

"Then don't," Hannibal pleaded with him. "Will, I know you want to help, but… at what cost? You are important to me. You shouldn't suffer for the sake of others. There's no need to martyr yourself."

"How can I ignore my gifts, Hannibal?" he asked, voice thick with emotion. "It's like I was put on this earth to serve the dead. How can I let them suffer because it makes me unhappy?"

"You have to decide that your well-being is more important," Hannibal replied, pressing a kiss to his temple. His curls smelled of mint and a dead body. "You can still help people. The dead still reach out to you on occasion. There's no need to immerse yourself in death."

'Oh hey!' Mischa said, gliding into the foyer.

Will laughed ruefully, glancing up at Hannibal with a raised eyebrow. “Mischa,” he greeted, glancing around the foyer.

Hannibal stepped back, letting the beautiful man go in favor of serving him a warm meal before it grew cold. “Come eat, beloved,” he said, gesturing towards the kitchen, “while it’s hot.”

Will ate well, considering how disturbed he still seemed to be. His pallor was gray, dark circles under his eyes. Tonight wouldn’t be another late night. Will needed his rest.

Still, he spoke to Hannibal about his favorite fishing spot by his house, telling him about how his dad used to take him fishing even before Will knew how to walk. “That spot by my house,” he said with a far away, dreamy, expression on his face. “It brings me peace to be there. It’s just… a slice of heaven on earth for me.”

“I would love to see it,” Hannibal smiled, wanting to know everything about Will in it’s entirety.

“Maybe this weekend we’ll walk over there,” he promised. “So long as the weather stays warmer like it’s been. It’s beautiful in autumn. All the trees in full color. I go there so much there’s an actual path to it, now,” he laughed.

As he finished speaking, Mischa slid the dining chair to Will’s right away from the table, making his beautiful man jump in surprise. “Jesus!” he laughed. “Moving much bigger shit than pennies, now.”

“And I’m still here!” she announced proudly, a wide smile on her face.

Will’s eyes were still on the dining chair when he spoke. “Have you touched a living thing, yet?”

The thought startled them both. He hadn’t felt her since they were children, aside from when she breezed through him occasionally. ‘Didn’t think of it,’ she admitted. She glanced pointedly at Hannibal, biting her lip. ‘Would it be weird, brother-mine?’

“No,” he said thickly. He held his hand out, palm up for her to do as she pleased.

Her hand glowed bright, a hopeful smile on her face as she reached forward.

Their palms met, and Hannibal *felt* her.

His breath left him in a whoosh. It felt… like pressure. There was no change in temperature whatsoever. Her touch wasn’t cold or warm, just… pressure. He couldn’t discern the texture of her skin, but he felt her all the same. She was *touching* him. They hadn’t done so in thirty years.

Their eyes met, and she seemed especially blurry. He blinked in surprise to realize he was crying.

‘Oh Han,’ she said fondly. ‘I’m right here.’

“What do I feel like?” he asked thickly.

‘No different than the chair, really,’ she laughed. ‘But it feels different because it’s you.’ Her hand pulled away from his palm, and she reached up to touch his face, instead.

Gentle pressure cupped his cheek, his tears swiped away by her thumb. ‘Don’t take this the wrong way, but-’ she winked out from existence.

Hannibal blinked in shock, a breath leaving him. “She… she may have pushed herself too far,” he said numbly.

Surprise lanced through him at the realization that Will’s eyes were glassy, too. He looked immensely moved, no doubt soaking up the shocked gratitude he felt in that moment. “I am… half-pleased and half-ashamed that I got to witness that. I feel I have no right to have seen it.”

“I am glad you are here,” Hannibal told him, reaching up absently to touch his cheek. The one Mischa had just… touched.

Will gave him a watery smile, reaching for his hand that he took in his own immediately. They shared a laugh, each completely overwhelmed by the turn of their night.

While they washed dishes after dinner, Will bumped Hannibal’s hip with his own. “So don’t get upset,” he said in forewarning, “but I Googled you.”

Hannibal paused while drying the plate Will had handed to him, raising an eyebrow. “I can’t imagine you found anything unsavory?”

“Nothing unsavory,” Will laughed, scrubbing a pan with vigor. “I just… I want to know everything about you. Everything. It was rude to do that, but… I learned a few things.”

“It’s not rude,” he said, placing the dried plate back in his cabinet. “I do wonder what you learned, however.”

“You are the youngest person to ever be accepted in Johns Hopkins,” Will said, a hint of pride in his tone. “You are scary smart, aren’t you?”

“No more than you,” Hannibal grinned, taking the pan from his wet hands to dry it. “That is true, though.”

“You got in because of incredible anatomical drawings that you did while you were in Sorbonne,” he recalled, lifting gray eyes up to meet Hannibal’s own.

“I enjoy sketching,” he admitted with a shrug. Will turned his eyes away to wipe down the sink, leaning his hip against it.

“Can I…” he bit his lip. “Can I see something you’ve drawn?”

“Of course,” Hannibal agreed. “In my study.”

Will followed him into the room, taking in the space, as well as all his books, with those incredible eyes. Hannibal hesitated with his sketchbook, fully aware of who he’d been drawing as of late. It might embarrass the beautiful man, and it might please him. He handed the sketchpad off, their fingers brushing as it exchanged hands.

Will smiled as he sat at his desk chair, clicking on the desk lamp to see the sketches better. Hannibal watched him flick the sketchbook open, the first drawing there being one that he drew months ago. “Wow,” he said, eyes wide. “This is… stunning.”

“The Cappella Palatina in Palermo,” he said softly. “Situated on the first floor at the center of the Norman Palace. The chapel is a great symbol of multi-cultural cooperation. Craftsmen of three different religious traditions worked alongside each other. So very little is known about the architecture as well as the mosaics, although the church itself was consecrated on Palm Sunday in the year 1140.”

“You… you drew this while you were there? Or is it from memory?”

“From memory,” Hannibal admitted. “It is my favorite place in the world. I imagine that what you feel about your stream is how I feel about visiting this chapel. As detailed as that sketch is, the drawing does not do the chapel any justice whatsoever. It is utterly remarkable in person.”

“I would love to see it,” Will said in awe, glancing up at Hannibal with a smile.

“I would love to take you,” he replied, making Will blush beautifully. “Merely tell me when, and we’ll be on a flight that day.”

“I’ve got a vacation coming up in January for spring break,” Will told him. “If you’re serious?”

“Give me the dates, and I will make us arrangements,” Hannibal chuckled. “Don’t tease me with Italy, Will. I love it there.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” he laughed. “I’ll let you know. I’ve got to renew my passport if we’re going to do that, but I am serious. I would love to go.”

He turned the page, taking in sketches that he’d done of his sister. “That is Mischa,” he said softly. “As she looked as a child,” he said, pointing to the sketch in the upper left. “And as I see her now,” he said, pointing to a sketch in the lower right.

“She is a beauty,” Will admitted. “She doesn’t have your cheekbones at all,” he chuckled.

“No, she does not.”

“She has your mouth. She has your jawline. She’s… beautiful.” Will touched the outline of her older form with just the edge of a careful finger. “This is who I’ve been talking to,” he

realized. “It’s nice to put a face to it.”

“I forgot that I could show you a sketch of her,” Hannibal admitted with a blush. “I don’t… generally share this with anyone else.”

“Thank you for sharing it with me,” Will said softly, glancing up at Hannibal with a grateful expression.

He flipped through pages and pages of sketches, some of buildings around the world, some of his parents. Eventually, he got to a sketch of himself. “Oh,” he paused. “You uh… you drew *me*.”

“How could I not?” Hannibal wondered. “I have never seen a more beautiful person in all my life. Everything about you reminds me of Michelangelo’s David. You are perfection, Will. The cut of your jawline, here,” he said, dragging his pinky against the sketch. “The angle is almost ruler-straight. The dark fan of your eyelashes. The wildness of your curls,” he tipped his head while regarding his work. “The flawless perfection of you cannot be recreated. Something fundamental about you is lost each time I put your image to paper. Appreciating you in person is preferable, but I do enjoy drawing you, nonetheless.”

It took him a moment to realize that he’d perhaps said too much, but there was nothing to be done about it, now. Will’s thick swallow let him know that he was shocked, the crisp sound of the page turning over-loud in the extending silence. There was another sketch of Will there, and Hannibal knew if Will turned the page, there would be several more. “You draw an ideal of me,” he said accusingly. “I don’t look like this.”

“You look just like that,” he responded, making Will’s eyes flash up at him in disbelief. “Only far more beautiful.”

The small noise that escaped Will’s throat as he tugged Hannibal over to him by his beltloops was desperate. Will came to his feet, pressing Hannibal back against the desk so that he had to sit on the desktop, his thighs spreading to accommodate Will who pressed between them.

Strong hands gripped the outsides of his thighs, tugging him closer as Will’s mouth descended against his own. The height of the desk was utterly perfect, neither having to do a thing to grind against each other. “Fuck, Hannibal,” he gasped, thrusting his hot, hard, cock right where it caused a fire in Hannibal’s blood.

Hannibal was losing leverage, so he regained it by grasping Will’s ass in both hands, pressing him firmly where he needed him the most. One of Will’s hands braced the small of his back while the other teased a nipple through his button-down shirt, stirring it to stiffness while licking into his mouth.

Will pulled away, sweet breath ghosting across Hannibal’s face while he flexed his hips, igniting a fire in Hannibal’s belly. “Take me upstairs?”

“Is it too soon?” he asked carefully. He did not want to ruin this by rushing anything between them. Absolutely nothing in the world was worth that.

“It isn’t soon enough,” Will gritted out, licking Hannibal’s top lip and drawing a shudder from him. “You’re not going to be like anyone else I’ve been with, are you? You’re going to ruin me for anyone else. I know it.”

Hannibal snarled possessively, biting his plush bottom lip gently between his teeth. “There will *not* be anyone else.”

“Is that right?” Will laughed, nuzzling his nose along Hannibal’s jawline. “Better get me upstairs and prove it, then.”

It was harder than he thought to pull away from Will’s body. He felt strangely shy bringing Will into his bedroom, as he hadn’t had anyone in his bed in a very, very, long time. He closed the door behind them, Will walking through the room with an interested expression on his face. “What if Mischa pops back over here?”

“She never manifests in my room, nor any bathroom,” he promised. “She also would never come through my bedroom door unless I’ve invited her in.”

“Sounds like she’s caught you… uh, red handed a few times,” he laughed, turning to Hannibal to lace his arms around his neck.

Hannibal held the small of his back while Will dragged kisses down his throat. “She caught me once when I was… fifteen I think? We both took measures to ensure a situation like that never occurred again.”

Gentle fingers carded through his hair at the nape of his neck, Will’s wide smile holding a touch of mirth as he leaned away. “You’ve changed my whole perspective about it. I never realized that when they pop in, they… they can see what we’re doing. My grandmother used to say that every time you touch yourself, all your dead relatives stand around the bed and watch you in shame. I worry there may be some truth to it,” he laughed.

There was a part of Hannibal that wanted to discuss that, but he decided not to. It had clearly been ingrained in him from a young age that sex, as well as sexual acts, were shameful. It was no wonder why Will tended to shy away from it, regardless of his gift. “Even if they did,” Hannibal chose to say. “We are alive, and they are not. We can do exactly as we please.”

“What would please me is if you stopped looking at me like that and kissed me instead,” Will retorted.

“Yes, sir,” Hannibal laughed, leaning in to part those scolding lips with his tongue.

Will was an incredible kisser. His lips stayed petal soft, his tongue sometimes almost shy about the way it stroked against Hannibal’s own. Sometimes Will was bold, licking his lip or biting down on it. His kisses were lush and deep, sensual in a way Hannibal had never considered kissing someone could be.

They got lost in the gentle drag of their lips and tongue, before Will instigated more. Determined fingers reached between them, undoing his button-down without parting their

mouths for a moment. Will's fingers slid along his sides once the shirt was undone, tugging the hem up from his pants before getting the last two buttons open.

He pulled away, lips deliciously reddened to look down at Hannibal's chest while parting the fabric with his hands, gliding his palms against Hannibal's chest. "Jesus," he sighed. "I knew you were in shape, but… when do you find the time for this?" he asked with a laugh, cupping his pectoral muscle in his palm.

"I go to the gym often," he admitted. "Sometimes before work, sometimes afterwards. I take it there are no complaints?"

Will snorted, glancing up at Hannibal ruefully while sliding his shirt off his shoulders. Curious fingers traced every line of muscle on his biceps, then his shoulders, before coming down to grip his chest again. "You are beautiful," he said breathlessly, fingers wandering to his sides, then trailing his lower back. "God, so beautiful."

"May I?" Hannibal asked, gripping Will's soft sweater in his hands. He tugged up gently to demonstrate what he wanted, and Will nodded. Hannibal slid it up his torso, and Will raised his arms to help him get it over his head. He was wearing a plain white tee shirt underneath. It was small enough that it left almost nothing to the imagination.

Hannibal found he did not want to use his imagination.

He gripped the thin material in his fingers, pulling it up as well. Will had to help him a bit, as it was molded over his body like a second skin.

Will fidgeted once he was shirtless, hands twitching as though he wanted to cover himself from Hannibal's gaze.

Even in Hannibal's wildest dreams, he never imagined Will would be this lovely.

His skin was pale as moonlight, only the faintest dusting of hair around his nipples. Otherwise, his chest was hairless and sculpted like a statue. He traced each deep crevice of muscle with his fingertips, trailing them into the divot of his sternum, then up to his collarbones. Will shivered, swallowing thickly while watching Hannibal's face. No doubt reading him to see what he thought.

He was certain his face told the truth. Will was absolutely magnificent.

"I wish I could take the eyes of everyone who's seen you this way," he admitted, making Will laugh.

"You'd be taking a *lot* of eyes," Will said through a chuckle. "I've been to the beach a few times in my life."

His arms were well-defined, his biceps an absolute thing of beauty. He was not ripped, however. Compact muscle, covered in flawless, pale skin. There was a scar on his shoulder, and Hannibal recognized it for what it was. "Who shot you?"

“A suspect,” Will said softly, eyes firmly planted on his own hands that were still wandering Hannibal’s chest. “When I was a beat cop in New Orleans. I didn’t think he’d shoot me, and… well, I misjudged the situation.”

Hannibal leaned forward to press a kiss against the scar, holding Will’s waist in his hands. His lips trailed from there, impossible to ignore the endless expanse of soft skin under his mouth.

-

Every inch of him was hot silk. It was a testament of his will that he didn’t throw Will to the bed to ravage him. Will’s back arched beautifully when Hannibal wrapped his lips around a dusky nipple, sucking it with teeth and tongue until it puckered in his mouth.

“Christ,” Will gasped, threading his hand through Hannibal’s hair to keep him right where he was. Hannibal spanned his hands against his skin, determined to feel as much of it as he could while flicking the swollen nub with his tongue.

The scent of Will’s arousal teased his nose, and he found he needed to taste it, as well.

He’d gotten to his knees somehow, trailing wet kisses down the flat expanse of Will’s trim stomach. He reached for Will’s belt, glancing up for permission, first.

Will swallowed thickly, nodding his head eagerly.

His weight shifted from foot to foot as he kicked off his shoes, standing in stocking feet while Hannibal undid his belt, then the button on his jeans. Getting the zipper down was difficult, as there was a sizeable erection straining the fabric, making Hannibal’s mouth water.

Once his jeans were undone, he gripped the denim in his fists and pulled down, taking Will’s blue boxers with it.

A perfectly pink cock sprang free, and he quickly shoved the material down Will’s legs to free him of the offending fabric. Will kicked them from his legs, making a devastated noise when Hannibal gripped the hot, thick, base of him, stroking him once. “Beautiful, Will,” he said reverently, licking his lips when he realized that the head of Will’s uncircumcised cock was glistening and wet.

He pressed a kiss just under the glans, holding the perfect thing in his fist. Will’s shiver jolted his entire body, so Hannibal glanced up to see if this was alright before continuing.

Eyes the color of dark sapphires regarded him ravenously, his sweet pink mouth parted in awe while watching Hannibal closely. He kept his eyes on Will’s face while licking the head of his cock, sweeping the taste of him onto his tongue.

He was perfect. Even the *taste* of him was perfect.

He gripped the base of his cock, angling it down so he could lave the head with an opened mouth, letting Will see everything he was doing. Letting the soft flesh glide against the flat of his tongue.

The gut-wrenching moan from Will demonstrated that it was welcomed.

Sealing his lips around the crown, he gave a rough suck against the head, pulling more of Will's essence onto his tongue. He slid down the shaft slowly, savoring the silken feel of him in his mouth. He pointed his tongue, tracing the underside of his cock while tucking Will into the safety of his throat. It freed his hands to do something else, so he allowed them to trail over protruding hip bones, then across his flat stomach.

"Hannibal," Will gasped, thrusting forward as he pulled back to lick the head of his cock again. A gentle hand cupped his cheek, stroking the skin of his cheekbone while descending down his shaft again, taking his time to lick and suck as he wanted to. "S-stop," he pleaded. "I want… Hannibal, bed."

He chuckled while releasing his cock from his mouth, pressing one last kiss to the shaft before coming to his feet.

Will immediately latched onto him, arms wrapping around his waist while their mouths clashed together. He was pressed back against the bed where Will gave him a little shove to make him sit at the edge of it.

He leaned back on his elbows, watching Will undo his belt buckle, then the button on his slacks. Aggressive hands tugged them down his legs, reaching for each shoe and sock to throw them to the side.

Will took his own socks off too, licking his lips while raking his eyes over Hannibal from head to toe. "Christ," he sighed, gliding his hands up the expanse of Hannibal's thighs. He pressed his hand over his aching cock which was straining the fabric of his boxer-briefs, cupping him in his warm palm. "Look at you."

"I'd much rather look at you," he said pointedly, allowing his eyes to travel over the beautiful body between his legs.

Will snorted, gripping the band of his underwear between his fingers. "Can I?" he asked hesitantly.

"Please," Hannibal moaned, arching off the bed as Will pulled them down his hips.

His cock throbbed in the open air, no friction at all to give him a reprieve from the arousal coursing through his veins. Will nudged him back on the bed, and he went willingly.

Will's body curled over his own, kneeling between his spread thighs while gripping the meat of his chest in his hands, cupping and squeezing. His mouth sealed over one nipple, sucking the flesh into his mouth with hot, wet, flicks of his tongue against the soft skin.

Hannibal moaned again, arching his back when Will alternated to his other nipple, gripping his pectoral muscles until they swelled around his fingers. Hips descended against his own, their cocks lining up and rubbing only enough to tease, making Hannibal near-mindless in pleasure.

Releasing Hannibal's nipple with a wet suck, Will leaned away to appreciate him again. "We should… probably talk about what we both like. In bed, I mean."

"Anything," Hannibal rasped, hips thrusting up so they'd meet Will's again. He wrapped his hand around them both, stroking them as best he could. "I like anything, Will."

"Really?" he asked in surprise, head lolling back at the pleasure Hannibal was bringing him. "I like… all of it, too," he sighed, dropping his gaze to Hannibal's hand that was working them both in his fist. "God, we look good like this. You feel amazing."

"As do you," Hannibal agreed breathlessly.

"At some point," Will said lowly, reaching down to slap Hannibal's wrist away from them. He took Hannibal's cock only in his fist, working him from base to tip with quick twists of his wrist. "I'm going to want this gorgeous cock inside of me. I am not ready for that, though. You're… big, and it's been at least six years since I've… done that. I want it, though. I *want* you."

"I am enjoying what we're doing right now," Hannibal said desperately, thrusting up into Will's perfect grip. "Very much."

"Then you'll enjoy this, I think," Will said with a grin before leaning over him to replace his fist with his mouth.

Hot, wet, suction engulfed him, making pleasure thrum hot through his gut. He watched Will's jaw stretch to accommodate him, those unbelievably eyes watching his every reaction. Will bobbed on him, working him deeper into his mouth, then the back of his throat. His eyes watered, his hands gripping Hannibal's thighs to spread them wider.

It had been so very long since he'd been intimate with someone else, and the abstinence did not help him, now. Will's beautiful, perfect, mouth was taking him apart, his clever tongue swirling over the head of his cock, gliding down the shaft while his lips created blissful suction. It would be over in less than a minute if he kept up like this, and he knew it.

"Will," he sighed, grasping a bulging bicep. "Please. Not like this. I want to kiss you, darling."

He let Hannibal's cock go, licking his lips while staring at him in disbelief. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"I want intimacy with you," Hannibal admitted. "I want you in my arms. I want your mouth on mine. Please."

Will seemed shocked by that revelation, but he moved up Hannibal's body nonetheless. Gentle kisses were pressed against his stomach, then his chest as Will eased his body down against Hannibal's own.

The warm, silken, weight of him was utterly divine as their mouths found one another. He trailed his fingers down the expanse of Will's back, delighting in the shiver that went through

the younger man with the attention.

He spread his thighs wider, making room for Will's weight between them so their cocks could grind together. It brought Will flush against him, making it possible to touch every inch of him that he wanted to.

It made it impossibly difficult to decide where to put his hands, as he wanted to touch all of him.

Will's desperate little grunts and moans filled the air as he flexed his hips against Hannibal, their sweat-slick bodies making the friction absolutely delicious. He nibbled on Will's shoulder, trailing his lips over to the expanse of his throat while grasping the flesh of his ass in both hands, urging him to take as he pleased.

He pulled away from Hannibal's shoulder, turning his face to capture his mouth in a heated kiss that felt conquering. One of Will's hands cupped his cheek while the other slid between them, grasping them both to jerk them expertly in his fist.

"Close," Will gasped, resting his forehead against Hannibal's with his eyes closed.

"Look at me, Will," Hannibal pleaded.

Dark eyes snapped open, pupils blown wide in his arousal. He let go of Will's bottom, sliding his hands up to cup either side of his face to kiss him sweetly, pouring every ounce of his affection for the other man into the action.

It was understood beautifully. Will gripped them both a little tighter in his fist, letting out a desperate whine while pumping them vigorously. Hot come splashed against his stomach, the heady, musky scent of him setting Hannibal off, too.

He plundered Will's mouth while toppling over the edge, his release washing over him for what felt like hours, but was likely only a minute. Will kissed him through all of it, swallowing every moan that rumbled out of him.

Will's mouth trailed down from his own, kissing his throat, then his sternum before flicking his tongue against Hannibal nipple. He shivered, laughing while shaking his head. "Does my chest please you?"

His nipple disappeared into a hot mouth, the suction making his cock twitch in overstimulation. Will let it go after a moment, blowing on the skin to make it pucker.
+
"Everything about you pleases me," he said lowly. "Being with you like this… it's not like it's ever been with anyone else. You… you *like* me."

It was said almost like an accusation, and Hannibal chuckled. "I've grown to care about you very much, yes."

"It's not just about how I look," Will realized, glancing up at him in wonder while still playing with his nipple with lazy fingers. "You *like* me. My personality. My… gifts.

That's…" he huffed a laugh. "That's weird to me."

"Everything about you is perfection," Hannibal said softly, stroking his fingers through Will's damp curls while touching his jawline with his other hand. "Outside and in."

"You haven't been inside me yet," Will said, though his vibrant blush betrayed his bold choice of words.

"You know how I meant that," Hannibal grinned. "Though I've no doubt that will be perfection as well."

'Are you naked, brother-mine?' Mischa trilled through the door.

"Yes," Will laughed, making Hannibal blush this time.

'Oh *shit*!' she chirped, sounding far too excited for her own good. 'Okay. Uh. Well, have *fun*! I'll just… I'll be… um-"

"Mischa, please!" Hannibal begged, covering his face in his hands, making Will laugh.

She was blessedly silent, and he hoped that meant she had drifted away from the door, though he doubted it.

Will touched his face, leaning in for a kiss with a smile on his face. "I should be going," he said regretfully. "I haven't been home for my dogs all day, and… I didn't get much sleep last night."

"I miss you already," Hannibal said miserably, making Will laugh while climbing from the bed.

"Is it okay if I use this bathroom to… uh, clean up?" he asked, standing gloriously nude and covered in their spend.

"Only if it's alright if I join you," Hannibal teased.

They took a quick shower together, washing each other gently while exchanging lazy kisses under the spray. It was over far too soon.

After drying off, Hannibal tugged on a pair of pajama pants and a sweater while Will got dressed in what he wore here, hesitating by the bedroom doorway.

"When can I see you next?" Will asked hesitantly, as though being clingy would push Hannibal away.

"As soon as possible," he chuckled, barricading Will at the door with his body. He smelled like Hannibal's body wash, and he found it unrealistically attractive. "Tomorrow?"

“Barring the likelihood of a dead body, you got it,” Will agreed, tipping his face up for a sweet kiss. “I’ll talk to Jack tomorrow, too. See if it’s okay if you… help me, occasionally.”

“Even if he just agrees that I can be your emergency contact,” Hannibal offered. “Someone to reach out to when you get lost in the darkness.”

“I’ll talk to him,” Will promised.

They headed downstairs, where Mischa was pretending to watch tv. The moment she saw them, she bounded over. ‘Are you leaving, Will?’

“Got to get home to the dogs,” he said with a nod. “Sorry we didn’t get to spend time tonight.”

‘*Oh*, that’s okay!’ she giggled. ‘Glad you had… fun.’

“Mischa,” Hannibal sighed, looking at Will apologetically. “Will, thank you for coming.”

Mischa snorted, and he glared at her before she glided off into the other room.

Will laughed, shrugging his shoulders. “Thank you for *helping* me come,” he said suggestively, making Hannibal roll his eyes.

“Between the two of you,” he said fondly, pressing a kiss to Will’s mouth.

“You love it,” Will laughed, holding him close to kiss him again. “I will hopefully see you tomorrow. If not, soon. Thank you for dinner, darlin’.”

The endearment warmed him from the inside, and he nodded while opening the door for him. “Anytime, beloved. Drive safely, please.”

“Always,” Will said, going on his toes to kiss Hannibal soundly.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter puts us past the half-way mark of this story! I honestly can't even believe it! We'll be done before next weekend. =[

The response to this story has been so moving. You guys, and this fandom, are the best.

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Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After Will left, he headed into the kitchen for a glass of water where Mischa rejoined him. ‘I know you don’t like talking about it with me,’ she began.

“Good,” he interrupted. “Because I have no intention of it.”

‘Jeez, defensive much?’ she griped. ‘All I wanted to say was that I approve of him, and I am happy for you.’ Those two things were actually nice to hear, so he nodded in thanks while sipping his water. ‘And I wanted to tell you not to fuck this up. Hold on to him, and don’t be an idiot. Those two things are difficult for you but do your best.’

“Very rude,” he chided, frowning at her while refilling his glass. “I don’t want to lose him, sunshine.”

‘Good,’ she said pleasantly, gliding off to the dining area. ‘Come watch tv with me for a bit before going to bed?’

“Of course," he sighed.

Will called him after six the following evening to tell him that he was in Minnesota for a case, and that he wasn’t sure when he’d be back. It seemed there were a string of abductions there, all young girls of a similar age, height, weight, and coloring. It didn’t sound like mere abductions to Hannibal, and Will seemed to agree.

“Jack is looking for these eight girls as though they’re *alive*,” Will said despondently. “I don’t think they are. There are no bodies, and there’s no evidence to suggest that they’ve been killed, but… I just know they’re gone, Hannibal.”

“Do you need me, beloved?”

“I’m alright,” Will promised, though he sounded uncertain. “All I’m doing is tracking down leads right now. Though… there aren’t any, really. We’re going to the most recent abductee’s home in a few hours. I want to talk to the girl’s parents and get her timeline right. Jack knows to call you if something happens.”

“Take care, please,” Hannibal pleaded. “Trust your instincts, Will.”

“I try to,” he sighed. “Talk to you soon, darlin’.”

“Good night,” Hannibal said, ending the call.

He was awoken just after midnight to his phone ringing, which was unusual for him. He reached for his cell phone blindly, answering the call to the unknown number. “Hello?” he asked groggily.

“Is this Doctor Hannibal Lecter?” came the gruff response.

“Yes,” he said, sitting up in the bed. “To whom am I speaking?”

“This is Agent Jack Crawford of the FBI. I’m calling on behalf of Will Graham.”

That caught Hannibal’s attention. He was out of bed and getting dressed before he heard another word. “Is he alright?” he asked in a panic. The sound of the phone ringing had brought Mischa to his room. She looked marginally concerned, as phone calls in the middle of the night were not a common occurrence. He put the phone on speaker so she could understand what was going on.

“He’s… physically unharmed,” came the uncertain response. “We had a crime scene tonight, and Will… hasn’t really come back from it, yet. He’s not speaking. He’s not responsive. I was told to contact you when he needed you.”

“If you give me the address, I will be there as soon as possible,” he said immediately while packing his overnight bag with whatever was within reach.

“I’ve done you the favor of reserving a flight for you,” Jack replied. “It leaves in an hour.”

“I’ll be on it,” he said assuredly. “Thank you for calling. Is he… is he nearby? May I speak with him?”

“One moment,” Jack sighed. He heard muffled talking, then another sigh. “He won’t take the phone, so I have you on speaker, Doctor.”

“Will,” he said as soothingly as he could while frantically packing a bag. “You’re alright. You’re safe. Come back to me, Will. Can you hear me? It’s Hannibal.”

“Hannibal,” Will repeated, though he sounded very far away. “Can you come here, please?”

“I am on my way right now,” Hannibal assured him. “Take the phone and get me off speaker. Can you do that for me?”

He heard rustling, then silence. “Okay,” Will said softly.

“Am I off speaker?”

“Yeah,” he said slowly.

“Beloved,” he sighed. “Jack told me you went to a crime scene.”

“Didn’t expect one,” he said softly. “He brought her back, Hannibal. He… he carried her dead body back to her own bed. Her parents didn’t realize she was in her room. She wasn’t

there this morning, but… she was there. I heard her. She… did something to me. She touched me, and I saw it. I saw him. I saw how she died as if it were happening to me."

Hannibal glanced at Mischa, stunned to hear that they could do something like that. She seemed surprised by the revelation as well, staring down at her hands as if deciding how she could do it. "It didn't happen to you," Hannibal said softly. "You're alright, and I'm coming to you now. Are your dogs looked after?"

"Alana is taking care of them," Will said monotonously.

It was an unexpected admission, but he didn't comment on it. "I'll be boarding a plane within the next forty-five minutes," he promised. "I will be with you soon. In the meantime, drink something with sugar in it for me. Orange juice would be best because I think you're in shock. Have they taken you to the hospital?"

"I'm at a hospital," he replied, though it sounded like he was just realizing it. "Why am I here, Jack?"

"Will, put Jack on the phone again for me, please," he pleaded while heading into his bathroom to finish getting dressed.

"See you soon?" he asked hopefully.

"Very soon, beloved."

"Crawford," came the gruff greeting.

"Are they treating him for shock?" he asked immediately, hauling down the stairs with his duffle bag and keys.

"From what I understand, yes. They're discussing a temporary psychiatric hold on him. What would your suggestion be, doctor?"

"He is not a harm to himself or others," he argued. "Have them treat him for shock, and then he can be discharged into my care."

"We'll talk more once you get here," he said dismissively. "There will be a car to collect you outside Duluth Airport."

"That's appreciated. See you soon, Agent Crawford."

He was almost numb with exhaustion by the time he arrived at the hospital. Mischa was worried about Will, and she'd talked nonstop since they'd left the house in Baltimore. In order to respond to her when she spoke, he placed his phone against his ear when they were at the airport around other people. He couldn't do that as they walked into the hospital, so he merely listened to her while they walked in.

‘I know she was murdered,’ Mischa went on, ‘but why did she have to torment Will? Poor guy, just living his life, then *bam*! Gruesome murder vision! How did she even know she could do that? I’ve been here for thirty years, and I didn’t even know that! He sounded so broken on the phone, poor, sweet, man. Is shock very serious? Could he die?’ she asked anxiously. Hannibal shook his head minutely, and she huffed in relief.

Hannibal went to the reception desk to speak with the receptionist, getting Will’s room number while Mischa worried.

They found his room on the fourth floor, and Hannibal went in with Mischa in tow.

Will was a gaunt looking thing, sleeping soundly in his hospital bed with an imposing man hovering by his side. He came to his feet warily when Hannibal walked in. “Doctor Lecter? Jack Crawford. We spoke on the phone,” he said politely, reaching for Hannibal’s hand to shake it.

He accepted it distractedly, eyes watching Will as he slept. “I wish we could have met under better circumstances.”

“Likewise,” he agreed, though there was an edge to his voice. “May we speak outside the room?”

“Of course,” Hannibal nodded.

With Will getting some much-needed rest, he followed Jack down the hall to a family consultation room. At this hour, the room was empty, which seemed to be why Jack favored it. Mischa followed them in, drifting to the window so she could see outside.

The moment the door was closed behind them, Jack rounded on him. “Why did you clear Will for field work, Dr. Lecter? He clearly was not ready to return.”

“Will had an extraordinary circumstance happen at this crime scene,” Hannibal replied defensively. “It was not something anyone could ever predict would happen.”

“Ah *yes*,” Jack huffed sarcastically. “The ghost of Elise Nichols touched him, conveying her last moments before her death. Do you honestly believe that?”

‘Wow,’ Mischa grimaced. ‘What a dick.’

“If Will claims it happened, then yes,” he said indignantly. “His gift, Agent Crawford. It’s a heavy burden to bear. I take it you do not believe that he has this ability?”

“No,” Jack replied immediately. “No, I don’t. I think Will has an uncanny ability to connect with crime scenes. I think his empathy disorder plays into that, though… neurotypical people have a hard time understanding how.”

‘*Idiots* have a hard time understanding,’ Mischa snorted, shaking her head in disgust.

A random thought occurred to him, making him wonder if he could make Jack a believer in Will after all. “I felt the same way,” Hannibal decided to say. “Until I saw it firsthand.”

“He infers things about you based on your facial expressions, how you dress, how you speak,” Jack went on, pacing the small space. “He puts those observations together, and he infers something about you based on them. The more you react to what he is saying, the more he knows that he’s hitting the nail on the head. You’re a learned man, Dr. Lecter. I looked into you after you signed off on Will, because I couldn’t believe that you had. You’ve got quite the resume. I think your *feelings* for Will Graham have clouded your judgment.”

Hannibal’s mouth flapped shut, and Mischa sighed. ‘Dick,’ she repeated unhelpfully.

“Alana told me,” he went on. “I know you’re… *seeing* him. There isn’t one thing preventing me from reporting you other than Will himself. He’s taken a shine to you, though I can’t imagine why. From what I see, he needs to be held for observation, and you need to be reported to protect other patients that you prey upon.”

‘How dare you!’ Mischa bellowed, though no one but Hannibal could hear her. ‘My brother doesn’t *prey* on people, you big old jerk!’

“I see him for what he is,” he bristled, clenching his teeth to contain his anger. “He is remarkable. He does not need a therapist. He is not unwell. The things he sees and does for you and the FBI take an understandable toll on him. He is a human being, regardless of how extraordinary he is. Has he never proved it to you?”

“What?” he snorted derisively. “Has he told me something that a dead relative has asked him to tell me? No. Not once. Even if he did, I wouldn’t believe it.”

“Not *that*,” Hannibal said dismissively. “Has he ever… had one of them manipulate their surroundings? Prove their existence?”

‘Please tell me you’re suggesting what I think you’re suggesting,’ she giggled. ‘Brother-mine, please!’

Jack blinked at him, shaking his head. “This is… completely ridiculous. I’ll be reporting you whether Will Graham wants me to or not.”

“Report me,” Hannibal agreed easily, flicking a quick glance at Mischa to let her know he wanted this from her. “But do so in fifteen minutes. That should be all the time he needs.”

Jack eyed him warily, nodding his head. “This is complete nonsense. I don’t have time for this, and-”

“Fifteen minutes,” Hannibal repeated, glancing off at Mischa who was smiling wide at him from the corner of the room. “I think you’ll believe him after that.”

They headed back to Will’s room, Jack sighing like a martyr the entire way. Will was still sleeping soundly, so Hannibal sat by his bedside to wake him. He encased Will’s hand in his own, stroking the roughened skin of his knuckles. “Will,” he said softly. “Are you awake, darling?”

His gray eyes blinked open exhaustedly, pupils dilated in the way that only drugs could achieve. The moment his eyes settled on Hannibal, he smiled. “Hello sweetheart,” he drawled, reaching up with a sluggish hand to stroke Hannibal’s face. His mouth moved a little slower, a boyish, drug-induced, grin on his face. “I was dreaming about you, you know. You’re so handsome. So *pretty*,” he sighed, making Hannibal blush. “How lucky am I?” he asked, smiling up at Jack while giggling.

“Will,” Hannibal pleaded, biting back a grin while Jack huffed in annoyance behind him. “I need you to wake up a bit for me, please. This is important, beloved.”

‘Will,’ Mischa said, letting him know she was there. ‘You need to wake up and snap to attention, bud. Your boss is planning to report Hannibal for misconduct and possibly put you away in an institution. We are going to prove that you’re not crazy, and we need you coherent to do that.’ She drifted closer to Will’s bed with a sigh. ‘He’s so *cute* when he’s high.’

Will’s eyes widened, and he sat up groggily in his bed. “I don’t feel well,” he grimaced.

“They gave you a sedative by the looks of it,” Hannibal told him. “Jack was telling me that you’ve never… asked someone from the other side to manipulate their surroundings. Like you did for me.”

Realization dawned on him, and he bit back a grin. “It’s not a side-show act,” Will slurred, glaring over at Jack. “It’s not something that’s fair to ask them to do.”

“Is there anyone… around us right now?” Hannibal asked, keeping his grin hidden from Jack who was loitering behind him.

‘Boo!’ Mischa giggled. ‘I am a tormented ghost!’

“Yes,” Will said, huffing a tired laugh. “We’re in a hospital. We’re… surrounded by them.”

‘Let’s put on a show, Will Graham,’ she laughed, hands glowing bright by her sides.

“Close the door, Jack,” Will asked softly.

Jack slammed it for good measure, turning to Will with his hands on his hips. “Well let’s go. I have shit to do.”

Will closed his eyes, taking a deep breath for show. “Is there anyone here with me right now? I need you to come forward.”

‘Hey,’ Mischa said, palms lit up like mini suns. ‘Sorry to bother you when you’re flying high, gorgeous. You were getting some beauty sleep, not that you need it. Your boss is a jerk, just so you know.’

“I know,” Will said softly, a gentle blush creeping up his face. “Give us a sign that you’re with us, please.”

‘Alrighty,’ Mischa laughed. The tissue box on his end table flew off, landing squarely by Jack’s feet.

“Jesus *fucking* christ!” Jack jumped, pressing himself back against the wall with wide eyes. “Who fucking threw that?”

“We’re not alone, Jack,” Will said ominously, making Jack’s eyes widen. “Are you still with us?”

‘Oh yeah,’ Mischa grinned, looking around the room for something to throw. The chair by the bed was a flimsy plastic thing, so she threw it to the floor with a loud bang.

“Fuck!” Jack wailed, panic rising with his every breath. “What’s going on? Don’t tell me *goddamn ghosts*, because-” Mischa threw the blanket off the bottom of the bed, and Jack yelped. “Tell them to fuck off, Will! Christ!”

‘Fuck off? He wants *proof* that I exist, then tells me to *fuck off*?’ Mischa glared at him, palms glowing bright. The light engulfed her, and the ceiling lights flickered around them. Even Hannibal was shocked by it, holding Will’s hand while she went subatomic. ‘That’s so *rude*!’

Lights flickered on and off while everything in the room that wasn’t held down fell to the floor. Will’s admission papers flew from the table, circling the room as though a tornado were blowing through it. The very energy she was putting out was palpable, akin to being close by when lightning struck the ground.

Will’s hand gripped his tightly, his eyes wide and horrified as Mischa tore the room apart. His plastic water pitcher and cup crashed to the floor while papers flew around them. Hannibal’s ears popped while the ceiling lights strobed on and off, making it impossible to truly understand the chaos she was wreaking.

She breezed through Jack’s quivering body, making him shiver like he’d caught a cold before slamming the door open hard enough that it bashed against the wall by Jack’s side.

‘Aw fuck,’ she sighed before winking out of existence.

The lights went on steadily, revealing Will’s trashed room and a heap of FBI agent huddled on the floor. “Holy fuck,” Jack gasped, grabbing the bed to haul himself off the floor. Will’s eyes were wide, his mouth parted in shock by what Mischa could do, now.

He’d need to get a storage unit for his priceless things as soon as possible, given the circumstances.

“What the fuck was that, Will?” Jack bellowed, making a nurse storm into the room to ask him to be quiet. Just as she was about to lecture him, she took in the mess of the room with a shocked expression.

“What happened in here?” she asked.

“There was a ghost,” Will replied nonchalantly. “They’re gone now.”

Hannibal covered his smile with his hand, bringing Will’s knuckles to his lips for a kiss.

Jack left the room once he was done shaking like a leaf, promising Will that he would get a sketch artist in as soon as possible so they could have the face of the killer from his memories. From Elise Nichols memories.

The room was blessedly silent, which was for the best, given how pale Will was. “I am fucking *high*,” Will laughed, turning his head to look up at Hannibal who was still sitting by his side on the bed. “Wow. Did that happen?”

“It did,” Hannibal grinned, leaning over the bed to kiss him. “I did not know she was capable of something like that.”

“I don’t think she did either,” Will laughed. “Your sister is *scary*!”

“Do you want to talk to me about what happened earlier at the crime scene?” Hannibal asked softly.

“Nope,” Will drawled, still smiling a drug-induced smile at him. “What I want is for you to crawl in this bed and cuddle me while I sleep off this horse tranquilizer. You need sleep too, I think. Your hair is mussed. You went out in *public* with mussed hair. Come to bed with me before people think you’re less than perfect.”

“The bed is a little small for us,” Hannibal chuckled, reaching up to smooth his apparently mussed hair.

“You’ve got a body that’s meant to be laid on,” Will grinned, biting his lip. “C’mon. Let me lay on it. You’re a fucking specimen, Hannibal Lecter. My *boyfriend*,” he drawled with a sigh while patting the bed. “Please?” he asked, eyes widening with an adorably innocent expression on his drugged face. Mischa was not the only one who knew how to play him, it seemed.

Hannibal sighed, kicking off his shoes while Will wiggled around on the narrow bed. Hannibal laid on his side, drawing Will close. The beautiful man snuggled into him like he was burrowing into a blanket, resting his head against Hannibal’s shoulder. “See?” he said proudly. “We fit. We always fit together.”

“There was never a moment of doubt,” Hannibal agreed, hiding his smile in silken curls. He pressed a kiss to the crown of Will’s head, holding his body tighter against his own. “My beloved.”

He did not think he would get any sleep, but he apparently did. They were awoken a few hours later, late morning sunlight slanting through the hospital window. A nurse was smiling at them from the foot of the bed. “Sorry to wake you,” she said, glancing down at her clipboard. “You’re getting discharged, Mr. Graham.”

“Good,” Will croaked, stretching himself leisurely against Hannibal’s side.

True to Jack's word, an FBI sketch artist met them at the motel where a room was reserved for them. "Does it have to be right this moment, Agent Crawford?" Hannibal asked.

"I want it to be," Will interjected, touching Hannibal's shoulder. His eyes still carried dark circles under them, and his complexion left something to be desired. "The sooner we have a photo of this guy, the better the chances are that we'll catch him. I don't want there to be another victim because I needed beauty sleep."

"I appreciate that," Jack told him, nodding his head. "This is Ana, she's our best sketch artist in the country. We'll get this guy, Will."

Will gave him a curt nod before following Ana into the motel room.

There were two flimsy plastic lawn chairs on the cement patio outside their room, so Hannibal sat there while waiting for Will to finish with the artist. Jack continued pacing, accepting a few phone calls where it seemed whoever was processing the body had found some evidence.

The motel resembled a hive of police and FBI presence, cars and agents coming and going, though he couldn't imagine what they were actually doing.

Jack sat by his side with a huff, turning to Hannibal with a remorseful expression. "I owe you a major apology," he admitted, shaking his head as though he didn't like that fact. "I said some nasty things to you, and I am sorry for that."

Hannibal watched him for a moment, realizing he was at least partly sincere. "There are no hard feelings, Agent Crawford."

"Jack," he said, extending his hand for another handshake.

"Hannibal," he nodded, accepting the handshake for what it was. A new beginning.

He took a deep breath, staring out over the busy street to their left. "What I saw early this morning changed everything I thought I knew about anything," he admitted. "I've never believed Will for a moment."

"It's a fantastic thing to believe," Hannibal agreed.

"He's worked for me for years," Jack huffed, shaking his head. "If he'd have just… done what he did earlier, I'd have believed him. Can I ask… you said he did something similar in front of you? What was it?"

"It was nothing at all like that," Hannibal admitted, deciding some truth was needed, here. "My sister passed when I was very young…"

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"It was thirty years ago," he said, though time had no impact on the depth of his loss. "During my second session with Will, he told me she was with us. He said her name, then he

told me something that… that no one would possibly know. Something she wanted to tell me all this time."

"It happened during the second session?" he wondered.

"She's not with me all the time," Hannibal shrugged. "He just happened to be in the room when she decided to visit me. I didn't believe him, so he proved she was there by having her slide a penny across my desk. I was… stunned."

"You got a penny, and I got a poltergeist," Jack laughed, shaking his head. "Lucky me."

"He does not like asking them to prove their existence because he never knows precisely to whom he is speaking," Hannibal lied. "There's no way to know if a spirit is angry or violent. He asked my sister because he knew who she was, and he knew she meant no harm."

"He doesn't prove it for good reason, then," Jack sighed. "Jesus Christ."

"That, and there aren't always spirits around him," Hannibal pointed out with a shrug. "Sometimes there is no one to ask."

"Well the one he asked in front of me was one pissed off hellion," Jack mused with a dry laugh. "I'd rather never see it again."

"That was… unbelievable," Hannibal agreed, thinking of the scene Mischa had made. He shivered just considering all the things she could break in his home, now.

"You still don't think he could use… therapy?" Jack asked hesitantly.

"What he needs more than anything else is understanding," Hannibal countered. "He needs people to listen to him when he's telling them what he's seen or heard. He needs a few quiet moments afterwards to come back to himself when one of them tells him something horrible, or… shows him, as this one did. It weighs on him occasionally, yes. Don't you think that's justified?"

"Yeah," Jack agreed with a sigh. "I hear what you're telling me, and I promise you that whatever Will needs from this point on, he's going to get it. I'll make goddamn sure of it."

"He can come to me when he needs someone to talk to," Hannibal promised. "I would also like you to keep my number stored in your phone. Should he ever need me as he did last night, don't hesitate to call."

Jack nodded, watching Hannibal carefully. "Alana told me about the two of you. She was concerned because she told me that the relationship was… romantic."

"It did not start out that way," Hannibal said slowly. "Initially I was fascinated by him, and… after spending some time with him we both decided it was something else. I am not proud, Jack. I won't give him up because of it, however."

"It's frankly none of my business. Will is a grown man, and… well, you're not his therapist. Just promise me that if you ever think he should talk to someone that isn't involved in his

life, that you'll send him to someone you trust."

"Of course I would," Hannibal said immediately. "Will's well-being is my utmost priority. What I think would help him more than anything else is if he stepped away from the field entirely."

Jack winced at that, looking up at the early afternoon sky. "As much as I hate to admit it, I think I have to agree with you on that one."

"He won't quit," Hannibal assured him. "He feels that his gifts are a sign that he was meant to help in this way, and he will never walk away if he thinks he's helping someone. Be a rock for him, Jack. When he needs someone who will listen to him, listen. When he needs a quiet moment, throw everyone else out of the room. What he needs more than anything else is to not worry that whatever he says or does will get him held in a psychiatric facility."

Jack sighed, rubbing his jaw with his fingers. "I haven't done that, but I am promising you that I will. He's in good hands from now on, I swear it."

"I'm glad to hear it," he said, and it was the truth.

Chapter End Notes

We are nearing the end, darlings! I think there are three more chapters total? How did THAT happen?

Thank you guys for all your kind words. I was so wary about posting this story, as it's a weird one, I know. I should know better by now. You guys are the best! <3

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> There be porn ahead! Once again, when it starts you'll see a - sign. If you'd like to skip, hit control-F and search for the + sign.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The motel door opened a few moments later, the sketch artist handing off an incredibly detailed sketch to Jack.

With the sketch in hand, a flurry of activity began. The sketch was handed off to someone who would make copies for all available units and agents working in the area. Will stood by the doorway, waiting for Jack to stop barking orders.

“Will,” he said after a few minutes. “I’d like a word with you. *Please*,” he added as an afterthought.

Will winced, nodding his head and gesturing for Jack to come in, and Hannibal followed.

Jack sat awkwardly at the foot of the motel room bed, while Will chose instead to lean against the small kitchenette. “I’m sorry I’ve never supported you or believed you before this,” he said right off the bat. “I’m going to do better by you, Will. From here on out, whatever you need. Okay?”

Will shook his head with a huff, but he nodded. “Okay.”

“Are you… are you in the right mindset to take me through what happened last night?” Jack asked.

“Yeah,” Will said warily. “Yeah, let’s… we can do that.”

“We got to Elise Nichols’ home last night to speak with her parents. How did you know her body was upstairs?”

“I *heard* her,” Will admitted softly. “She was… whispering. I could barely hear her. I went upstairs, and the sound of her voice didn’t get any louder. I think… I think she sounded that way because he strangled her. Sometimes after they die, they… they stay as they were at the moment they died. I don’t know why, but… I think it has something to do with a violent end.”

“So you went upstairs and found the body,” Jack pressed.

“I don’t even remember *seeing* the body,” Will sighed. “I walked in the room, and… I told her I couldn’t hear her. I felt cold, and then… Jesus, it’s like it was *me*. *I* was sleeping in her bed, awoken in the middle of the night to someone strangling me. I looked into his eyes, and all I could see was that he was sorry. He… he felt terrible about what he was doing to me, like he had no other choice.”

“Is that where the vision ends?” Jack asked softly.

“No,” Will shivered. “There are bits and pieces afterwards. He bled me. Hung me on… on *antlers*. He cut me from here,” Will pressed against his sternum, sliding his fingers to his navel, “to here. He took something out of me, then… put it back.”

“Her liver,” Jack acknowledged in shock.

“There was something wrong with it,” Will said, eyes far away. “He looked devastated.”

“She had liver cancer,” Jack told him. “Not even her parents knew about it.”

“I was in a cabin,” Will recalled, eyes flicking back and forth. “A hunting cabin. He took her there to gut her. He had an antler room in it. The ceiling, walls, everything. Covered in antlers. That’s where he mounted her. You’re not finding any evidence from those girls because he’s *eating* them, Jack. He’s… honoring them completely. Every single part of them is used for something else. He couldn’t do that with Elise. She was sick. He brought her body home as an *apology*.”

Silence hung thick in the room after Will’s revelation.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Jack sighed, rubbing his eyes with his fingers. “I take it none of… *them* have ever shared what happened to them like she did with you?”

“Never,” Will whimpered, wrapping his arms around himself. “I didn’t know they could *do* that.”

“Elise had a piece of a metal shaving on her nightgown,” Jack told him. “We’re narrowing down which construction companies and pipe fitters use that type of metal. We’re close, Will. We have his face, we have his profession. Agents are going out to the twelve companies that use that metal right now with sketches of him. It’s a matter of hours before we have him.”

Will let out a shuddering breath, his fingertips white where he was holding himself. Hannibal couldn’t watch him try to comfort himself anymore. His feet took him to Will without conscious thought so he could wrap the man in his own arms. Will let out a shuddering breath, melting against his chest with a sigh.

“Get some rest,” Jack said, coming to his feet. “We can handle this from here on out. You’ve done good, Will. Thank you.”

Will nodded, resting his forehead against Hannibal’s shoulder as Jack left the room.

The moment the door closed, Will’s arms came around Hannibal’s neck, holding him tight while he shivered. “God,” he gasped, clawing himself closer. “He believes me. He… he

believes me."

"He does," Hannibal said softly, holding him as tightly as he could. "He believes you, and I believe *in* you. You're alright, beloved. I've got you."

The sharp sob that cut through Will wracked his entire body, and Hannibal held him through all of it.

It took time for Will to return to himself, his clawing hands growing soft and tender. Hannibal mimicked his affection, gentling his hold as Will did. "Can you just come with me for every scene?" Will croaked, voice thick with tears. "Sometimes all I need is a fucking hug, and you give the best hugs."

"I'll quit my job tomorrow," Hannibal chuckled, pressing a kiss to his temple. "I'll follow you around the country and hug you anytime you need it. Maybe even when you don't," he chuckled.

"Don't make promises you can't keep," Will laughed weakly, nuzzling into Hannibal's neck.

"I didn't say it in gest," Hannibal promised. "I don't care about my practice, Will. I care about you."

"I know," Will sighed, body going lax in his arms. "I know you do."

"I'll speak to Jack," Hannibal offered. "See if he can take me on as a consultant."

"He can't afford you," Will laughed.

"I truly don't need the money," he countered. "I can keep a few patients via video conference if it came to it."

"I can't let you give up your practice," Will said, leaning away to look up at Hannibal with eyes the color of sea glass. "I was… I wasn't serious, Hannibal. You have to stop giving up the things you love for other people."

"It's a good thing that I truly do not love my practice," he said truthfully. "I hate it, Will. I hate being there. I despise listening to people sob about their affairs and the parties they weren't invited to. I'm tired of being propositioned," Will's eyes flashed up at him, and he shook his head. "No one to concern yourself about, beloved."

"I'd rather you quit your practice and go back to surgery," Will responded. "That's where your heart is."

"My heart is right here," Hannibal contended, reaching up to stroke the soft skin of Will's throat. "Right here with you, Will."

Will's throat constricted with a swallow, his eyes searching Hannibal's face. He went to his toes to press a kiss against Hannibal's mouth. The kiss was gentle. Just petal soft lips and sweet tongue, no ulterior motive other than adulation. Hannibal reveled in it, threading his fingers through thick curls that felt like silk against his fingertips.

‘I threw a bitchfit!’ Mischa bubbled, popping back into the room with them. ‘Jeez! Get a room! Should I leave again?’

Will pulled away with a laugh, pressing a kiss to Hannibal’s cheek. “No Mischa,” he sighed. “Good to have you back with us.”

‘You see what I did?’ she chirped while twirling around in the room. ‘God! It was like that movie Poltergeist! He told me fuck off, and I don’t even know what happened! I went supernova, like Jean Grey when she becomes the Phoenix in X-Men! When can we do that again?’

“Never, dearest,” Hannibal chuckled. “You made quite a point. You’re a force to be reckoned with.”

After they took turns showering, Will brewed a pot of coffee for them at the small kitchenette. He sat at the dining table with his paper cup while discussing what Elise Nichols did to him. ‘I don’t know how she would have done that,’ Mischa said, gliding around the room with a thoughtful expression on her face. ‘I mean… how did she even *know* she could do that?’

“Unless it only happens in cases where the person dies violently. She was strangled, and… maybe her throat was messed up because of it. I could barely hear her,” Will shrugged, sipping his coffee. “I have no idea, but… maybe she had no other way of telling me?”

‘I want to practice it,’ she said determinedly. ‘Would you let me?’

“Mischa,” Hannibal interjected. “Will does not need to see how you died.”

‘Oh eww!’ she grimaced. ‘I wouldn’t show him that! Gross, Han. I could show him things that I’ve seen. Things from when I was a kid. I could… I don’t even know! Show him Lecter Castle.’

Will shrugged, placing his paper cup down on the table. “Try it,” he offered, holding out his hand.

“Will,” Hannibal said warily. “You just went through something horrible. Do you truly think now is the time to experiment with such a thing?”

‘I’m not going to show him gross stuff!’ Mischa objected. ‘I don’t know if I can show him anything at *all*. Give me a minute to think of something.’

“It’s fine, Hannibal,” Will said reassuringly. “I trust her.”

‘Okay,’ she nodded. ‘I got a memory I want to share with you.’

Will’s hand faltered as she conjured touch and placed her palm against his own. Her glow emanated from inside of her, her eyes closed with the effort she was making.

“Oh,” Will said, smiling with his eyes closed. His eyelids were moving behind his pale lids, thick lashes resting against his cheek. It was silent for a few moments, both of them touching while whatever she was showing him played out in real time.

The moment ended, their palms disconnecting. Will’s eyes blinked open, the sheen on them apparent as he reached shakily for his coffee. “Thank you, Mischa.”

‘You saw it?’ she asked excitedly.

“I saw it,” he agreed thickly. Will’s eyes lifted to Hannibal, a gentle smile on his face. “We were by a stream. Sunlight filtering through leaves that were red and gold,” he said softly. “You were… so *small*. ‘M’ is for ‘Mischa,’” he repeated.

Hannibal’s body went numb, his throat clogging with tears. “Yes,” he said softly, knowing the exact memory she’d shared with him. They were playing by the stream, and Hannibal had used a stick to make the letter ‘M’ in the dirt. It was the last time they went out to play before the weather had turned. Before that winter took his family away.

Will had just seen one of his memories played out in his brilliant mind as though he were there.

“Do the memories have to be ones that you had when you were alive?” Hannibal asked in awe.

‘Dunno,’ she shrugged. ‘Wanna go again?’ she asked Will with a giggle.

“Yeah,” he agreed easily. “That was *beautiful*, Mischa.”

He held his palm out, and she thought for a minute before glowing bright again. Will jolted when their palms connected, his eyelids fluttering shut with whatever she’d decided to show him.

It was silent again for a few moments, Hannibal watching his two favorite people on earth connect in a way that no one else could.

Their palms disconnected, and Will opened his eyes with a wide smile. “The Norman Chapel?” he asked.

‘Yes!’ she bounced in place. ‘That’s Hannibal’s favorite place in the world. We went there a lot when we were living in Italy.’

“The jewel tones and gold,” Will sighed, shoulders relaxed. “You didn’t tell me about that.”

“It is something you need to see to believe,” Hannibal said thickly. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Stunning,” Will said, eyes firmly set on Hannibal as he said it. “You were walking along the wall, maybe… twenty? So young. Your hair was dark, swept over your forehead in a careless way that you don’t do anymore. You were wearing a gray button-down, shirt sleeves rolled up, eyes taking in your surroundings. There were candles lit in little red votives along the wall. They made your eyes look like amber.”

Hannibal blinked in surprise, a blush creeping up his neck. “Did you not look at the chapel?”

“A bit,” Will laughed. “There was something far more beautiful to look at. I’ll see it in person when we go in January.”

‘Didn’t know I was giving you Hannibal porn when I shared that memory with you,’ she grimaced. ‘Ugh.’

Will’s laugh was more carefree than he’d heard it since he left for this trip, and he felt relief upon hearing it. “Sorry to say, your brother is gorgeous.”

“Hotter than Richard Madden?” she asked in disbelief.

“Way hotter,” Will grinned, still watching Hannibal with enough fire in his eyes to make his blush have heat.

‘Bleh,’ she bemoaned.

“I am starving,” Will announced, coming to his feet to throw his paper cup away. “There’s a diner down the street if you want to walk with me?”

“Of course,” he agreed easily.

The food was sub-par at best, but it was at least something to eat. The company made the experience much better. Will’s mood seemed lighter after Mischa shared her memories with him, and the beaming man sitting across from him was a far cry from the shivering mess he’d been earlier this morning.

Will complained about his grits with good humor, telling Hannibal that he knew they weren’t made with real butter. He flirted and smiled, every inch the beauty that had captured Hannibal’s heart the moment he met him.

All of that changed as they were walking back to the hotel when Will’s phone rang in his pocket.

They learned the name of their killer, Garrett Jacob Hobbs. When the FBI descended on his home, he killed his wife and daughter before being shot to death himself.

Will’s mood grew somber again once he received the news, his quiet demeanor somewhat alarming. They found Hobbs’ cabin, and Jack asked if Will would go with them to see it.

He declined.

They were laying in the hotel room bed that night, Mischa absconded to the Middle Place. “What’s the *point* of my gift?” he asked out of the blue. “What’s the point of seeing what I see, and hearing what I hear, if it doesn’t *save* anyone? How did he have time to kill his wife and daughter? Why, Hannibal?” his voice broke, so Hannibal tugged him into the cradle of his arms, holding him close.

“You cannot save everyone,” Hannibal responded. “There are things outside of our understanding. Things we’re not meant to know. You have a clearer picture than most, but you are still a person. An extraordinary one, but you’re still human. Garrett Jacob Hobbs is responsible for the lives he’s taken. For the families he’s destroyed. You are not responsible for any of it. Why did he kill them? Why was he allowed to? Perhaps that was always his intention. What happened to them is horrific, but… he will never take another girl from their families. He will never hurt anyone else. The silver lining is thin, but it is still there.”

“Maybe I need you around for more than hugs,” Will mused, going up on his elbow to stroke Hannibal’s cheek. His fingers traced his cheekbone, then his chin. They slid up to touch his laugh lines, gliding down to press against his bottom lip. Hannibal kissed the fingers, holding Will’s wrist while looking into those unbelievable eyes.

“Whatever you need from me,” Hannibal said softly, fingers trailing against Will’s back. “Anything, Will.”

Will kissed him gently, licking into his mouth. Hannibal parted his lips with his tongue, kissing him back just as gently as Will was kissing him. He’d never tire of this. Having the attention of this incredible man felt on par with being chosen by God.

He felt undeserving, but he’d never turn a miracle away.

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Their bodies inched closer, hands gripping one another while their lips lingered and tasted one another. Will pulled away to shuck his tee shirt, rolling himself between Hannibal’s thighs. Their kisses grew heated, and Hannibal gripped him by his waist to haul him up, licking a path down his neck to take a sweet nipple into his mouth.

Will straddled him, moaning loud as Hannibal latched onto the peak, suckling the flesh with teeth and tongue.

Clothing was frantically discarded before they were blessedly skin to skin, their arousals pressed deliciously between them. “We don’t have anything to… make love, do we?” Will asked breathlessly, gripping them both in his palm to work them with his fist.

“I have something in my bag,” Hannibal admitted, blushing when Will raised an eyebrow. “Not for *this*, but… for myself.”

“So no condoms?” Will asked, licking Hannibal’s top lip suggestively.

“No,” he admitted. “It’s been… three years since I’ve been intimate with someone else.”

“Longer for me,” Will laughed, pressing a kiss to the side of Hannibal’s mouth. “I trust you, Hannibal. Make love to me.”

“Are you… are you *certain*?” he asked doubtfully. “You’ve been through a lot today, and-”

“You’ve *never* treated me like I’m fragile,” he said, mouth pursing. “Don’t start now. I want you, and I want this. Please?”

Hannibal swallowed thickly, nodding his head. He went to his bag, digging through the side compartment for the very-likely expired small tube of lubrication, then came back to the bed.

Will was on his back, watching Hannibal with a smile on his face. “Come on, gorgeous. Make love to me.”

An invitation like that was impossible to refuse. He climbed back into the lumpy motel bed, settling himself between Will’s spread thighs. The lube was set aside for now, as he had things he wanted to do, first.

The most pressing one being that he wanted to kiss this beautiful man until his lips were aching.

Will laughed as he kissed him soundly, kissing him so deeply that Will’s legs went around his waist, urging him on. His lover’s hands didn’t know where to settle, they mapped every inch of Hannibal’s back, arms, shoulders, and chest with interest.

His kisses roamed down over flawless skin, sucking and licking every hot inch of him. Will moaned when he sucked a nipple into his mouth, biting down on the skin to pebble it against his tongue. He trailed his kisses lower, dipping his tongue inside the treasure that was Will’s belly button, then lower to taste his hip bones. There was not a thing about Will that he didn’t think was absolutely beautiful, and the intensity of Will’s eyes while he watched him let him know that his beloved man knew it.

The scent of his flushed-pink cock resting against his abdomen was too much to ignore, so he pressed a sweet kiss to the head of it, flicking his tongue out to collect the flavor of him. Hannibal swallowed him down without any warning, wanting the ache of his cock stretching the back of his throat.

The guttural little whimper from Will was rewarding, as was the way his legs came up to rest over Hannibal’s shoulders while he deepthroated him. He released Will’s cock with a sigh, wishing he could take it right to the finish line. He wanted to know what Will tasted like. He wanted a part of Will to stay inside of him.

Another night, he decided while gripping the back of Will’s knees in his hands, pressing them forward against his chest. His hips rose, exposing the perfect pucker of his entrance. He trailed kisses lower, suckling each of his testicles, which were utterly perfect against his tongue.

His mouth watered as he trailed lower, licking over the most intimate part of Will’s body with a gentle tongue.

Will keened, toes curling in the air while his hand went for his own cock. “No,” Hannibal demanded. “Don’t touch yourself, Will. Wait till I’m inside of you.”

“Fuck,” he gasped, trying his best to arch from the bed. “Please. Hannibal, please.”

He licked into Will again, the tightness of his body almost unbelievable. The muscle fluttered against his tongue as though Will was trying to take it inside of him. The thought made Hannibal groan, and he opened his mouth wide to seal it over him entirely.

His tongue pressed and retreated against the muscle over and over, until Will’s body opened minutely for the attention. His cock felt heavy where it hung between his thighs, throbbing and desperate to be inside of this beautiful body.

He couldn’t wait anymore.

Going back on his haunches, he reached for the lube, watching Will pant against the bed with parted lips. “Are you sure?” he asked again.

“I will fucking *beg* you if you want me to,” he snapped. “Don’t make me beg. It makes me mad.”

“Heaven forbid,” Hannibal teased, slicking his fingers with lube. He reached between them, circling the wet entrance before sliding a finger inside. Will’s eyes rolled back in his head, legs tightening around Hannibal’s waist.

“*Yes*,” he gasped. “Thank fuck.”

He opened him up slowly, stretching him as carefully as he could. With three fingers buried inside of Will, he teased at his prostate occasionally, making Will quiver each time he brushed the little nub.

Will went up on his elbow, dragging Hannibal over for a kiss while stretching him open. The angle was awkward, but he would never, ever, turn Will down for a kiss.

“Ready,” he moaned. “Hannibal, come on.”

He withdrew his fingers from the furnace-like heat of Will’s body, reaching for the lube again to slick his cock until it was dripping with it. He slid the head of his cock against Will’s entrance, watching as the muscle fluttered and tried to take him in. With a moan, he pressed in.

Will’s body welcomed him as though he were made for him. His hips slid forward, each inch of him gliding inside of the tightest heat he’d ever experienced. A little sob of pleasure tore from Will’s mouth, his hands clawing against Hannibal’s sides to pull him closer.

Hannibal fell forward, bracing his elbow by Will’s head, his clean hand stroking the soft stubble on Will’s jawline. Pressing his hips forward, he buried himself inside as far as he could.

Will’s eyes were pinched shut, a tiny hint of discomfort on his face. Hannibal gave him a moment to recover, kissing his cheek, then the corner of his mouth as sweetly as he could.

With a huff of breath, Will's eyes opened, their faces merely millimeters apart. "Was your father a horse?" Will asked gruffly, his fingertips touching Hannibal's throat.

A startled laugh tore out of him, and he dropped his forehead against Will's own. "Am I hurting you? We can stop," he apologized.

"If you stop, I will never speak to you again," Will laughed, closing the distance between their mouths to share a kiss.

Hannibal shifted his hips gently, making Will's eyes roll shut. The pleasure of it was exquisite, Will's body, tight and hot and clamped around him to the point of almost-pain. He gripped Will's legs, hoisting them over his forearms to change the angle of his thrusts, and Will groaned.

"Right like that," Will said breathlessly. "Oh, fuck. Hannibal, *right like that*."

His pace increased as he felt Will's body relaxing, then responding. Will kissed him desperately, each thrust of his hips making their stomachs trap Will's cock, giving him much-needed friction.

There was no space between them whatsoever. Will's arms were around his shoulders, their chests brushing with each press of Hannibal's hips. He wanted this everyday for the rest of his life. He wanted *Will* for the rest of his life.

Their pace grew desperate, sweat dampening their bodies while Will keened in pleasure. He came hot between them, his back bowed and his mouth parted. Hannibal couldn't resist licking in, tasting the heat of his pleasure with his tongue.

As he came, his muscles clamped down on Hannibal like a vice, milking his own release out of him even though he wanted to keep going. His orgasm washed over him, and he slammed himself deep as he came, his moan muffled against Will's mouth while his lover stroked tenderly through his hair.

Will's legs wrapped around his waist, holding him right where he was as they came back to earth. He kissed the sweaty base of Will's throat, trailing kisses back to that delicious mouth.
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Gentle fingers gripped his face, tilting it up so Will could look at him. Whatever he found made him smile, a pleased kiss pressed to each of Hannibal's cheekbones. "How did I get so lucky?" Will asked, shaking his head.

"I've asked myself that same question everyday since meeting you," he admitted, nuzzling his nose against Will's jawline. "You're a miracle."

Will smiled again, pressing a kiss against Hannibal's temple while he disengaged from Will's body with a sigh. Will fluffed a blanket over them, snuggling into Hannibal to hold him close.

‘The thing about motel rooms is that there is nowhere for me to pop back over safely,’ Mischa sighed.

Hannibal blinked his eyes open, squinting at the foot of the bed where his sister was hovering, faced pointedly at the windows. “Mischa,” he gritted out. “A moment of privacy, would you?”

They were at least covered by blankets, but he still felt that Mischa was seeing more than he’d ever like to her see. “Morning,” Will said sleepily, nuzzling his face into Hannibal’s chest.

‘Morning Will,’ she laughed. ‘I’ll come back in… a bit.’

“Five minutes,” Will sighed, inching himself closer to Hannibal who was hiding beneath the blankets. “Come back in five. We won’t be naked, promise.”

‘Gotcha,’ she said, winking out.

“Couldn’t have asked for fifteen minutes?” Hannibal chuckled, nuzzling into the soft skin of Will’s throat.

“I honestly can’t believe it was Mischa that woke us up,” he said, tipping his face up to make room for Hannibal’s mouth. “I’m surprised it wasn’t Jack.”

Hannibal hummed, biting the soft skin of his shoulder gently. “We should get up, then,” he sighed.

Will’s fist wrapped around his cock, giving him a teasing stroke. “Seems like you’re *already* up,” he laughed.

“Will,” he pleaded, thrusting his hips pathetically for more.

He was released just as quickly as he’d begun, and Will crawled from the bed to head to the bathroom with his overnight bag. “Shower?” he asked, waggling his eyebrows.

“Shower,” he agreed easily.

Chapter End Notes

Two more chapters to go! Thank you all for every kind word and kudos! <33

ALSO: There might be three chapters? I haven't decided, yet. haha

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Warning for this chapter. Read it when you have a quiet moment. Don't do it at work. =\

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There wasn't time for anything more than washing up, as the steady banging against the door implied a hint of urgency. Will got dressed as quickly as he could, heading to the door with his clothes stuck to his skin.

"Sorry if I disturbed you," he heard Jack say through the bathroom door while he got dressed. He combed his wet hair as best as he could before rejoining Will in the main area of the motel room.

Jack averted his eyes the moment he walked out, embarrassed despite he and Will being dressed. "What's wrong, Jack?" Will asked, setting out to brew a pot of coffee at the kitchenette.

"We interviewed a few neighbors and friends of the family," he said, looking at the mussed bed with a grimace. "Seems that his daughter, Abigail, spent most of her time with her father at the cabin."

"She's dead," Will sighed. "Does it matter what she may or may not have done at this point?"

"We know he didn't lure those girls in himself," Jack continued, pacing the room. "A nineteen-year-old girl could, though."

"Even if she did," Will argued, crossing his arms defensively. "Who's to say she didn't do it because she was afraid? She clearly knew what her father was capable of doing."

Mischa popped back into the room with a groan. 'Not *this* guy again,' she sighed.

"Then why not turn him in?" Jack asked in exasperation. "Why let it escalate like this?"

"He was her father," Will replied immediately. "Above all else, he was her *dad*."

"We found evidence in their fridge and their freezer," Jack sighed. "He was eating them, Will. It's very likely that Abigail knew that, too. What kind of a person… knowingly eats another human being?"

Hannibal stiffened, turning away to pack his dirty clothes to keep his hands busy. Mischa glided over to him, conjuring energy to touch his shoulder. 'People who have no other choice,' she said softly.

Will's eyes widened, watching the way Hannibal went through the room without making eye contact.

He knew. Somehow, the pieces fell together, and he *knew*.

Will would never see him again, that much was certain.

"People who have no other choice," Will said numbly, repeating to Jack what Mischa had just said to Hannibal. "Will it make you feel better to tear her down with him? Let her rest in peace, Jack. He can't hurt her anymore, and she can't lure anyone to him ever again. It's his fault. Let him keep it."

Jack sighed, rubbing his jaw with his fingers. "We'll keep this part of the investigation quiet," he agreed reluctantly. "Though I really don't feel that we owe Abigail Hobbs any favors. I've booked you both a flight home later this afternoon. Take a break from this, Will. I need you strong for the next one."

Will nodded, and Jack left the room.

'I really wanted to scare the shit out of him again,' Mischa mused, gliding over to the windows to watch him leave. 'I could throw a chair outside?'

"Mischa," Hannibal said numbly. "Maybe you should go to the Middle Place for a moment."

'Why?' she asked indignantly, turning to Hannibal with a frown.

Will went to him slowly, his eyes glassy as he cupped Hannibal's face in his palms. "Whatever you did to survive that day is okay," he said softly, turning Hannibal's insides to ice. "I am not judging you for it, and I am not leaving you because of it. You hear me?"

No one knew. *No one*. He and Mischa had kept it the darkest secret between them for all this time, but Will knew.

He knew, and he was still here.

The breath in his lungs left him in a whoosh, his eyes tearing up without his consent. Will's arms came around him, holding him tight while Hannibal squeezed the life out of him. A sob choked out of his mouth, and Will shushed him, pressing soft kisses against his cheek.

'I told him to,' Mischa said by their side. 'He was too weak to move. Too malnourished to walk. There was nothing to eat aside from a few scraps of moldy bread, and I knew he'd have to eat something more than that to walk the few miles in the snow. I told him to consume me. My body… it wasn't *me* anymore. If it could keep him alive, then I wanted him to do whatever he had to in order to live.'

"I made her leave the room," Hannibal gasped, clinging to Will like a lifeline. "I started a fire in the hearth to warm myself, as I was so cold I could barely feel my fingers. I went to the kitchen for a knife, and… and…"

“Hannibal,” Will sighed. “You don’t have to tell me. I know. It’s okay. *It’s okay*,” he repeated, hugging Hannibal for all he was worth.

“I took two days to recover,” Hannibal said softly. “She made me strong enough and well enough that I survived the walk to the town. I owe her everything that I am, Will.”

‘You owe me nothing,’ she said softly. ‘You would have done the same for me. I know it.’

Hannibal nodded, reaching for her over Will’s shoulder. Her palm glowed as she touched his hand, the pressure of her touch as grounding as Will’s embrace was. “Anything for you, sunshine.”

The plane ride home felt unbearably long. He felt drained and exhausted by his revelation, something wounded inside of him tearing open again, reminding him that the pain was still there. He’d never been proud of what he did to his sister’s body. He’d never accepted that he desecrated her in that way.

It had been a secret concern that she never left him because she couldn’t. His body was her graveyard.

She’d never spoken to him about it. If it was a passing thought in her head, then she had always kept it to herself. It might be his fault that she couldn’t move on. That she couldn’t feel the sunlight on her skin.

He felt grateful and selfish at the same time.

He stayed silent, his hand laced with Will’s own while Mischa sat in the aisle, touching Will’s palm occasionally to share a memory with him. His lover’s eyes were closed, a faint smile on his lips over every memory she gave him.

Will never responded when she spoke to him, as there were other passengers on the plane that would hear him talking to someone that didn’t exist. She didn’t seem to mind, though. She explained every memory after she passed them along, giving the backstory for the specific images that she sent him.

Hannibal recalled each and every one of them, his mood lightening with the bubbling cadence of her voice. She was his sunshine, warm and unbearably bright. With his fingers laced between Will’s own, the darkness of his memories receded.

When they arrived back in Baltimore, Will gripped his forearm. “Take tomorrow off,” he pleaded. “Come stay with me in Wolf Trap. I’m not going to work tomorrow, either.”

‘Puppies!’ Mischa chirped, clapping her hands together.

“I would like that,” he said easily. “Yes, Will.”

On the drive to Wolf Trap, he called his patients he was meant to see the following day to tell them that he was called away for an emergency and would be out of state. A few of them

were understanding, while a few, like Gwen, were not.

Will sat silently in the passenger seat, waiting for him to be finished with his calls. By the time they pulled up to Will's home, they both cringed when they realized there was a red Prius in the driveway. "I forgot to tell her I'd be home tonight," Will sighed.

"Why does she look after them, Will?" He tried to keep any hint of jealousy out of his tone, but he might have failed in that endeavor.

"She lives the closest," Will reasoned. "She's only twenty minutes away, and… well, I don't have anyone else that I could possibly ask to do it."

"Where is your car, beloved?" Hannibal asked.

"At work," he sighed. "I left it there when we headed for the airport. It's okay, I'll have Jack get it brought to me tomorrow. My keys for it are in my work desk."

They took their bags from the car, heading up the stairs while his dogs barked madly from inside the house. Alana opened the door looking entirely at home in Will's house, her eyes widening at the sight of the both of them. "Sorry Alana," Will sighed. "I forgot to call and tell you that I was coming back today."

"That's okay," she said, voice completely monotone while staring pointedly at Hannibal. "I love them, Will. It's no trouble."

"Were they good for you?" he asked, dropping his bags with a smile on his face. His dogs rushed out of the house as she opened the door wide for them, attacking Will with eager kisses and jumping legs. A surprised laugh bubbled out of Hannibal at the sight, lightening his mood even further.

"They were great," she sighed.

Will very likely didn't hear her, as he was laughing and petting his dogs who had knocked him into the grass. "I missed you guys!" he laughed, wincing as Max licked him across his face. "Yeah! My good dogs!"

"Nice to see you, Hannibal," she said, though her tone implied it was anything but.

"Likewise," he said, infusing every bit of annoyance he felt at seeing her into his voice for good measure. "How have you been?"

"Fine," she spat.

A few dogs wandered over to greet him, too. It was a shock, and he smiled while petting Winston. "Hello Winston," he chuckled, leaning over to let the dog greet him with a lick, too. "That's a good boy."

"I put your mail on the dining table," Alana told Will, who'd come to his feet to brush dried grass off his knees.

“Thank you for that,” Will said politely, watching his dogs bound through the yard in their excitement.

Winston still hadn’t left Hannibal’s side, so he kept petting the good dog, smiling to himself when he realized that Winston was giving him a version of a smile as well. “Didn’t think you liked dogs,” Alana huffed.

“I love animals,” he told her without looking up at her. “I especially love this one. He’s a good boy.”

“Right,” Alana sighed. “I’m heading off, then.”

“Thank you for watching them,” Will repeated, giving her a smile that would melt a glacier. He was truly a beauty. There was no doubt he could read her underlying tension, but he stayed kind and polite regardless. There was so much good in him that Hannibal could not understand how he’d gotten lucky enough to capture his attention. Or his heart, for that matter.

“I don’t want to sound unfriendly,” she said, gathering her purse. “This is the last time I’m watching them. So long as he’s around,” she said, gesturing to Hannibal with a nod of her head. “I can’t be.”

Will’s mouth fell open at that, and he glanced at Hannibal with a frown. “I’m sorry to hear that,” he decided. “He stays, Alana. If you can’t be happy for me, then you’re the one that’ll go.”

Mischa had winked back just as Will had began speaking, and she groaned. ‘I was so determined to never see this miserable bitch again,’ she sighed.

“You were leaving,” Hannibal pointed out when Alana went still in shock. “Thank you for watching Will’s family in his absence. I will ensure that someone else minds them if we’re called away again.”

“We?” she asked in surprise.

“We,” Will repeated firmly.

Will headed up the porch stairs, brushing past her to head into his house with their bags. Hannibal followed him, Will’s dogs in tow behind him. “I’ve spoken to Jack,” she said as he walked past. “It won’t be long before someone else is asked to consult in your place.”

“Jack informed me that you’d spoken to him,” he replied, delighting when her eyes widened. “He and I have come to an understanding, and I’d dare to say we’ve attained a tentative friendship. I was very honest with him, and I think he appreciated it immensely.”

“With Will’s condition,” she began.

“There is no condition,” he retorted. “That too is something in which Jack has a better understanding. Move on, Alana. You’re a professional. Act like it.”

He slammed the door behind himself, shaking his head with a sigh. Mischa breezed through the door, giggling madly. ‘God, I wish I could record things to rewatch them again and again. Her face, Han. I am *dead*.’

“Maybe the only person in the world who’s allowed to use that expression,” Will laughed. He gathered their dirty clothes from their shoulder bags, glancing at Hannibal. “Is there anything here that can’t get dumped in a washing machine?”

“Not at all,” he chuckled. “Dry on low heat though, please.”

“Sure,” he agreed easily, heading off to his basement with their bundle of clothes.

‘You really have a winner there,’ Mischa mused. ‘He does laundry. He forgives a ghost sister who loiters and is awkward. He’s a gem.’

He watched Will’s retreating form, a gentle smile on his face. “I’m very well aware, sunshine.”

Will joined him in the kitchen while he was putting together their dinner. Will’s freezer didn’t have much in it, but there were two perfectly fileted trout in vacuum sealed pouches. He had three potatoes and a few carrots, which was more than enough to feed them something hearty for dinner.

Mischa put Will’s radio on, as she tended to like background music even at home. “Mischa showed me a memory of you at a charity ball, I think,” he said while chopping garlic.

Hannibal was peeling the potatoes and cutting them into cubes by his side. “Ah,” he nodded. “In France.”

“You danced with a pretty blonde woman,” Will said, glancing up at Hannibal with a smirk. “You can *really* dance. I didn’t know that about you. You were ballroom dancing in a tuxedo, so stunning that even the people off to the sides couldn’t take their eyes off you.”

“I believe they were looking at the Prime Minister of France’s daughter, who so happened to be my dance partner at that moment,” Hannibal chuckled. “I am flattered you thought they were watching me, however.”

“I don’t know,” Will teased, bumping him with his hip. “Even your dance partner was looking at you like she struck gold, so I wouldn’t dismiss it. She knew she was a lucky girl.”

“I took lessons once I moved in with my aunt and uncle,” Hannibal admitted. On a whim, he reached for Will who dropped the knife to the counter with a clang. “Dance with me, beloved.”

“No!” Will laughed, allowing himself to be twirled in his small kitchen. “I can’t dance!”

“You’re dancing right now,” Hannibal grinned, a laugh bubbling out of him at Will’s indignation. He held his waist close, leading him through what could be a waltz if Will

weren't stepping all over his feet. "The timing is one-two-three," he said, counting out loud with each step.

Will burst into a vibrant laugh, nodding his head as he caught on quickly. They moved in a small circle, as there wasn't room for much else. Mischa breezed into the room with a sigh, her mouth stretched in a smile. 'The two of you are… *much*.'

Hannibal raised his arm, pressing Will under it for a twirl. He went willingly enough, stepping back into his space with a laugh. With a kick of his leg, Will dropped back with a startled yelp as Hannibal dipped him. His eyes were sparkling, his chest heaving as he stared at Hannibal's mouth, then his eyes.

He was kissing him before he even understood he'd moved.

'I've got to learn to manipulate a hose,' Mischa sighed, drifting out of the room. 'The two of you need to be hosed down.'

Hannibal held him close while lifting him back to a standing position, never breaking away from his sweet mouth for a moment. Their lips parted, and Will looked marginally dazed. "Okay," he said, licking his lips. "You're a prince, aren't you? God damn Prince Charming in my dingy kitchen."

"Hardly," he chuckled, staring at the flushed face of the beautiful man that had captured his heart. "Chop that garlic for me, please."

"I was *doing* that," Will argued, pointing the knife at him for good measure. "Steer clear while I'm dicking with a blade, please. It's hard enough not to cut myself, never mind when you want to waltz in the middle of it."

"Mischa," Hannibal called out, resuming his task with the vegetables. "Come back, sunshine. We're decent."

'For once,' she griped. 'Can I let the dogs outside?' she asked.

"They won't go far," Will nodded. "Leave the door open for them to come back in."

'Will do,' she chirped.

They worked in silence for a few minutes when Will dropped his knife to the floor with a clang. Hannibal winced at the noise, turning to Will immediately. "Are you alright? Did you cut yourself?"

Will's eyes were far away, his head tipped in the way that demonstrated he was listening to someone that Hannibal could not hear. There was no blood, which meant he hadn't cut himself. He'd just been surprised.

He picked the knife up, tossing it into the sink while waiting for Will to come back to him.

Will's eyes raised to his, though they looked vacant. "*È ora che tua sorella torni a casa, amore mio*," he said, the Italian message clear despite Will not being a native speaker. "*Se ne*

anda' presto. Tempo di dire addio."

Hannibal's blood went ice cold, and he shook his head. "It's my mother," he gasped.

Will nodded, holding Hannibal up when his legs gave out. "What did she say?" Will asked in shock, folding to the ground with Hannibal in his lap. "Hannibal, what did she say?"

"She said," he gasped, gripping Will tight, "that it's time for my sister to come *home*."

Will held him close, rocking him through the immensity of his grief in that moment. It *couldn't* be true. It simply couldn't. She couldn't leave him. How would he survive without her?

"I'm here," Will said softly. "She's still here. It's okay, Hannibal. God, it's okay."

He sobbed, holding onto Will for dear life.

Will had made sure he was put back together by the time Mischa breezed back in, no worse for wear aside from his splotchy face which he hid from her by chopping his potatoes. 'It's all moody in here,' she giggled. 'Who died?'

"Mischa," Will said softly. "Don't joke about that."

'Jeez,' she sighed, her touch landing on Hannibal's shoulder reassuringly. 'Okay. Well… after dinner I'll make myself scarce,' she sighed.

"*No*," Hannibal said immediately, turning to her with a desperate shake of his head. "You'll stay right here with me. Alright?"

Her eyes widened, and she nodded. 'Anything, brother-mine,' she shrugged. 'What do you want to do tonight?'

"Hannibal wanted to walk you over to the stream," Will said softly. "I have a really nice spot right over there," he said, pointing out the window. "You can see the stars for miles. He was telling me he wants to spend some time with you."

'Isn't that so fucking cute?' she giggled. 'Are you not coming, Will?'

"I think…" he sighed, turning toward their dinner again. "I think I'll stay in. I'm a little tired."

"You could come with us," he said softly, touching the small of Will's back. "Come with us, please."

"Spend some time with her," Will answered. "I'll *always* be right here."

Hannibal had no idea what their dinner tasted like, but he ate it anyway. Mischa was sharing memories with Will, who laughed for some of them, and smiled for others. He said nothing, as he had no idea how much longer Will would have with her to absorb them.

It was unthinkable that he might be losing her, soon. He'd couldn't recall a single moment of his life without her, aside from those few hours before she'd returned to him while he rocked her corpse in his arms. Even those few hours were absolute torture.

After dinner, Will took over the dishes, ushering Hannibal out of the room. "Go to the stream," he said encouragingly. "I got this, sweetheart."

Hannibal pressed a kiss to his temple in thanks, heading out into the living room for his jacket. "Ready sunshine?"

'As I'll ever be,' she laughed.

The moon was shining bright, illuminating the worn path to the creek with no effort. It wasn't very cold out, the early autumn air holding the warmth of summer in its grip. She breezed over the grass, moonlight filtering through her, making her look ethereally beautiful. 'I wish you lived somewhere like this,' she sighed. 'How gorgeous is this?'

Hannibal allowed his eyes to drift from her, taking in Will's favorite place in the world. It seemed like a travesty not to share it with him for the first time he'd see it. "This is beautiful," he agreed. It was, too. Moonlight glinted off the crystal-clear stream, the grass swaying in a gentle breeze. The sky was lit up with stars, as far and wide as the eye could see.

'Reminds me of our stream back home,' Mischa smiled, face tilted up towards the heavens.

"It does," he agreed thickly.

'There's something I need to tell you, but I don't want to upset you,' she said carefully, turning her face to watch him closely. 'I feel it, Hannibal. That… pull.'

"I know," Hannibal admitted, his voice breaking. "Mother spoke to Will tonight. She said… she said it was time for you to come home, and that you were leaving soon. That I needed to say goodbye."

'Mama was here?' Mischa asked excitedly. 'I miss her and Papa so much!'

He said nothing in response, as his throat was uncomfortably clogged with tears. Her eyes softened while her palm glowed bright. She touched his face gently, tracing away tears that escaped unchecked. 'Oh my dear heart,' she sighed. 'I will always, *always*, be with you. You know that, don't you?'

"Don't go," he pleaded. "Mischa *please*. For me? You said you'd go home when I left this world, too. You… you *promised* me."

'You don't *need* me, brother-mine,' she said, smiling gently. 'Will Graham loves you, but more than that… you love that man.'

“I will *always* need you,” he said fiercely, swiping his tears away angrily. “You’ve forced me to be a good man, Mischa. You’ve… you’ve kept me decent. You’ve kept me from… from…”

‘The darkness inside of you,’ she said knowingly. He gasped in shock, never realizing she had any idea of it. ‘I know, Han. I know how much that winter changed you. I know the darkness in you has always only been looking for a way out. I think I’ve stayed because I’ve always known it. I’m handing the torch to Will, Hannibal. He will be your light when you wander into dark places.”

“I don’t want you to hand me off,” he said despondently. “Mischa, please. Ignore that pull like you did the last time. Stay with me.”

‘I *can’t*,’ she said softly. ‘This morning it was… a little. Now it’s… it feels like I’m here and not here. Hannibal, I *need* this. Don’t you want me to be surrounded by our family? Don’t you want me to be as happy as you are? I love you, Hannibal. I love you *so* dearly. It’s time that we both moved on. You have a wonderful man in that house that loves you so much that I can feel it from here. There isn’t a thing he wouldn’t do for you. And before you do something stupid, like leave him so that I’ll stay, think about what you’d be losing. Think about what you’d be forcing me to give up.’

“Mischa,” he sighed. He looked up at the stars, though he could not see them through his tears. “What will I do without you?”

‘You’re going to live,’ she answered, sweeping the tears from his face. ‘You’re going to live and love and be as happy with him as you possibly can for as many years as you can get. Then, I’ll be the first one to greet you when you come home to me.’

“I love you,” he whispered. “My sunshine.”

‘As I love you,” she smiled. ‘My storm cloud.’

Hannibal swallowed thickly, trying his best to regain his ability to speak. “What do you want to do for your last few days with me?”

‘I don’t think I have days,’ she said honestly, making Hannibal feel like the earth was disappearing beneath his feet. ‘All I want is to spend time with you and Will. I already love him, Hannibal. He’s wonderful.’

“He is,” he agreed easily. “Then that’s what we’ll do.”

‘It’s probably going to really upset him, but I want to pet Winston,’ she laughed. ‘Hell or high water, I am touching that dog.’

“Just a few more minutes here,” he pleaded, watching the way her smile stretched her lips. The way the moonlight filtered through her. He wanted this moment to stay with him until his last.

‘As long as you need, brother-mine,’ she promised.

Will held Winston steady, petting him to reassure him. “Okay,” he laughed. “Pet him, Mischa.”

Her hand glowed bright, a vibrant giggle bubbling out of her. ‘Oh God,’ she said as her fingers worked into his fur. ‘He’s *so soft*! I can’t even really feel it!’

Winston looked vaguely alarmed, eyebrows shifting between he and Will as if trying to figure out who was touching him. Since the touch was kind and friendly, he stayed where he was. Will laughed, glancing at Hannibal with a wide smile. “He’s okay with it,” he said in surprise.

‘Look at his face!’ she squeaked. ‘Ugh! I love him!’

She pet him for another few seconds before withdrawing her hand. ‘I don’t want to wink out and scare anyone,’ she said softly.

“All done?” Will asked.

‘All done,’ she sighed.

He let go of Winston’s collar, letting the dog gallop off into the front yard.

They stayed up late together, talking and sharing stories in Will’s living room. Will held on for as long as he could before he fell asleep, his head in Hannibal’s lap. Hannibal brushed his fingers through his curls, marveling at the trust that came with such an action.

‘Remember when I was small, and you’d do that to me?’ Mischa asked. ‘I used to love when you did that. It made me feel so safe.’

“I remember,” he said softly. “What if you leave… and he and I don’t work out?”

‘Look at him, Han,’ she sighed. ‘He’ll be with you till the end if you don’t do anything stupid. So don’t do anything stupid. And don’t be boring.’

He chuckled, glancing away from the sleeping angel in his lap to look up at the one floating in Will’s living room. “How does one avoid being boring?”

‘One avoids it by avoiding speaking about oneself in third person,’ she giggled.

“Noted,” he laughed.

‘Don’t withdraw from him like you do with me,’ she said softly. ‘Tell him when something is bothering you. Talk to him about that darkness inside of you, and how impossible it feels for you to fight it. Be honest with him and worship the ground he walks on. The next time I see you, I want you to tell me what your life was like after spending it with my brother-in-law. You hear me, don’t you?’

He glanced down again at the beautiful wonder in his lap, his dark lashes splayed on his pale cheeks. “I hear you,” he promised.

‘When you miss me, tell him. When you’re sad, tell him. Share with him. Don’t make me have to come back here to yell at him and make him give you shit.’

“It doesn’t seem fair,” he sighed, stroking his fingers through Will’s hair. “I’ve found a remarkable man that… that I truly do love, even though it doesn’t feel like it’s been long enough to know it. With that love comes a loss. A devastating loss. Why does that have to be the way for me?”

‘It’s not a loss,’ she said softly, conjuring touch so she could stroke through Will’s hair, too. ‘God it’s soft, isn’t it?’ she laughed.

“He’s a beauty,” he agreed.

‘I am not ever leaving you, Han. I’ll be with you when you take Will to see Italy in January. I’ll be with you when you marry him. I’ll be with you when he adopts ten more dogs and drives you nuts with all the dog fur. Death hasn’t taken me away from you, and neither will moving on. Be strong for me, brother-mine. It’s not goodbye forever. Just for now.’

“It feels unbearable,” he said, throat tightening with tears.

‘It does,’ she agreed. ‘I get Mama and Papa, but I don’t get to talk to you every day. I won’t know how Game of Thrones ends,’ she sulked. ‘Damn it. I will never know if Jon Snow is a Targaryen.’ She looked especially put out by that, and Hannibal laughed through his tears. ‘The point is, you’ll be okay. I’ll be okay. Quit that stupid practice that you hate so much and do something you love.’

He nodded, a yawn surprising him while he shook himself awake. ‘Sleep, Han. I’ll be here when you wake up.’

“Promise me,” he pleaded, watching her closely.

‘I promise,’ she smiled.

He blinked his eyes open with a start, late morning sunlight slanting through Will’s windows. He could hear talking outside, so he climbed from the bed to see what was going on.

Mischa and Will were outside with the dogs, though Mischa looked… different this morning. Fainter. As though a breeze could take her away.

He slammed out the door, startling Will who was relaxing in the rocking chair to the side of the door. “Morning,” he said, glancing up at Hannibal with watery eyes. He knew. He knew she wasn’t going to be here for much longer.

“Why did you let me sleep?” he asked, voice breaking. Panic was rising in him, though there was no outlet for it.

‘I told him to because I know you won’t sleep well after this,’ she said softly. ‘It’s time, Hannibal.’

“*No*,” he said, shaking his head. “No, it isn’t.”

‘I waited to say goodbye to you, brother-mine.’

“Mischa,” he sobbed. Will came to him, folding him in his arms as he collapsed against the front porch. Will held him, his tears soaking into Hannibal’s shirt.

‘Will,’ she said softly. Her hand glowed, but not as brightly as it had only days before. She touched Will’s face, sweeping his tears away. ‘We haven’t known each other long, but I already love you dearly.’

He nodded against Hannibal’s shoulder, rocking him gently. “It has been a pleasure,” he said thickly. “You make it completely impossible not to love you.”

Hannibal gripped his arm, holding him tight while he fell apart. His eyes were on Mischa, though. ‘Take care of him, please.’

“Always,” Will promised. “He makes it impossible not to love him, too.”

‘He can be stubborn,’ she warned him. ‘He can be withdrawn. Be in his face and in his piece as much as possible. Smile even when he’s scowling.’

“Okay,” Will laughed, sniffling through his tears.

Her hand left Will’s cheek, settling on Hannibal’s. ‘I’ll miss you, brother-mine. You are my best friend. The light in my life, and my afterlife. We’ll see each other again.’

“I love you, sunshine,” he said softly, his tears pouring freely even as she wiped them away.

‘As I love you,’ she smiled. ‘Can you hear them? Mama and Papa?’

Hannibal shook his head, but Will nodded. “They’re loud,” Will mused.

‘I get it from somewhere,’ she laughed. ‘I love you both. Be good to one another.’

“Mischa,” he sobbed. He watched her fade away, bright light engulfing her like she was standing in front of the sun. He felt it the moment she was gone. Like something inside of him was wretched away, torn from him like a limb.

Will held him, rocking him through his gut-wrenching sobs. Winston put his head in Hannibal’s lap, trying to sooth an ache that had no cure. He held onto Will tighter, allowing Will to keep him together.

Chapter End Notes

I am SO SORRY. I wanted to warn people, but there was no way to do it without major spoilers. It's not MCD, either, as she's... dead.

Love you guys. <333

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

- denotes smut. Search the + sign to skip ahead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He barely remembered the following few days. Will took care of him. He called his own work and called out for the rest of the week, citing a death in the family. He called the patients for Hannibal's work, canceling their appointments indefinitely.

He put food and water in front of him. He helped him shower. Through all of it, Hannibal was absolutely not present.

Will spoke to him in hushed tones, conveying reassuring words that Hannibal simply couldn't feel. The words washed over him like salt water over raw wounds. It cleansed, but it *hurt*.

He stayed with Will for three days in that state, until on the fourth morning Will touched his shoulder. "She said to tell you to get off your ass," he said carefully. "You can't wallow like you did when you didn't get into Columbia." The statement shocked him, an unexpected laugh rumbling from his chest as he laid in Will's bed. He blinked up at Will, taking in the beautiful man who hovered over him in concern. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "I'm just the messenger."

Hannibal grabbed him, hauling him in for a hug that he clearly did not expect. Will held him just as tightly, pressing a kiss to his cheek. "Forgive me," Hannibal asked softly. "I have been absent from you, haven't I?"

"It's okay," Will said softly. "You're allowed to grieve, Hannibal. I wish I knew what to do for you, but… I really don't. I'm here when you're ready to talk."

"I can't withdraw from you," Hannibal realized, stroking his fingers across the lovely expanse of his jawline. "I can't lose you because I've become a ghost."

"You wouldn't lose me even if you did," Will promised. "I love you, Hannibal. You're a good man. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. I'm not going anywhere, okay?"

"I love you, Will Graham," Hannibal responded softly, stroking his thumb against Will's plush bottom lip. Will's eyes watered, and he sat up to kiss the tears away with his lips. "I love you because you make it impossible not to."

Will laughed, smothering Hannibal in a hug that made him feel alive for the first time in days. He held Will tight, resolved that he'd do better for this beautiful man that gave him a reason to live.

He decided to quit his practice. It took a while to refer his patients, going through his planner to find alternate therapists that had openings for each of them. Gwen was a special case, one that he still had not figured out how to help.

She came for her last appointment with him, settling on the sofa with a hesitant smile. “This is it,” she said with a shrug. “It’s going to be strange talking with someone else.”

“I have referred you to my mentor in Hopkins. He is an exceptional psychiatrist. Everything I’ve learned was from him. You are in very good hands, Gwen.”

“It’s just a shame that my mother will never meet you,” she sighed.

“It is a shame,” he agreed, shifting one leg over the other. “May I share something with you? Something personal about myself?”

She looked surprised by the request, and she nodded. “Of course.”

“My sister passed away when I was just a boy,” he admitted to her, making her eyes widen. “There were years of my life where it… felt as if she were still with me. I avoided relationships because of her. I avoided a profession that I favored because of her. Almost everything in my life was catered around her ghost, Gwen. Do you know what I’ve realized?”

She looked utterly shaken when she shook her head. “What’s that?”

“I was holding myself back,” he admitted softly. “She was not the problem. I was. I held onto her so tightly that… I doubt either one of us could move on. When I started to accept that my burden was my own, my entire life changed. I am without her, yes. But I am alive.”

Tears coursed down her cheeks, and she looked away. “I have no idea how you know,” she said softly. “Was it… obvious?”

“I only realized that your mother was gone recently,” Hannibal admitted to her, keeping the details of how he knew to himself. “Grief is a strange process. There are many who want to tell you how to feel when a loved one passes. They tell you there are stages, and they’ll tell you how long you’re allowed to mourn before it’s no longer an acceptable amount of time. The truth is that we all feel loss differently. We all process it differently. My sister died thirty years ago, but it still feels like it’s been merely days. I am allowed to miss her, just as you are allowed to miss your mother.
“The important thing is to take responsibility for it. It is no more your mother’s fault that your relationships have failed anymore than it was my sister’s fault that my own failed.”

“She was… difficult,” Gwen confessed, swiping absently at her cheeks. “I couldn’t move without her knowing about it. I couldn’t leave the house without her wanting to know why and where I was going. When she passed…” she said brokenly, folding in on herself as though trying to keep herself together. “No one *cared*, Dr. Lecter. I could die on the street, and no one would give a shit. She isolated me from everyone else, then died on me. After she was gone, I had no one at all.”

“She did not die to spite you, Gwen,” he said softly. “I’m sure if given the choice, she would have stayed with you until the end of time. You were precious to her, and I have no doubt that you still are. You’ve sabotaged careers and relationships because you feel that your mother would have disapproved of them. Am I correct?”

She nodded, then shrugged. “She knew what was best for me.”

“*You* know what’s best for you,” Hannibal said reassuringly. “As per the agreement you signed, your patient files will be transferred over to Dr. Stevens so he can get to know you before your first appointment with him. I will not be sending him anything more than the notes for this session.”

“Why?” she asked in surprise. “Why would you do that?”

“Because today is a new beginning for you, Gwen,” he said reassuringly. “When you miss her, talk about her. When you’re stressed because life is difficult sometimes, talk about it. All I’m asking of you is that you be honest with yourself, and be honest with Dr. Stevens from now on. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes,” she nodded. “I can do that.”

“Good,” he said with a smile. “I’m sorry to tell you, but… that’s our hour. I don’t have any other patients for the day, though. If you feel you need more time with me, it would be on the house.”

She laughed, sweeping tears from her cheeks. “I don’t… I don’t know how to move on. I don’t know where to begin.”

“Start with something you’ve always wanted,” he said. “Your mother sent you to college for business, but you always wanted to be a nurse. Start there.”

“Go back to college?” she asked in surprise. “I’m… I’m thirty-four!”

“And I was just about your age when I changed from surgery to psychiatry,” he informed her, watching as her mouth fell open in shock. “Now I am forty, and I am about to begin a new career as a consultant for the FBI. It’s never too late to do something you love, Gwen. Never.”

A small, hesitant, smile stretched her lips. “Nurse Gwen,” she said softly, reaching up to stroke the pendant at her throat. “It has… a really good ring to it, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” he agreed with a smile.

She stood from the chaise, smoothing out her pencil skirt against her legs. Hannibal stood too, rebuttoning his blazer as she reached for his hand.

It wasn’t so much a handshake as it was a grateful hand squeeze, the sentiment behind it clear. “Thank you, Dr. Lecter. Really.”

“Take care of yourself, Gwen,” he said with a smile. “You come before anyone else. Remember that.”

She nodded, letting his hand go to head for the door where she paused. “Your sister… do you ever… just talk to her?”

“Every day,” he admitted with a grimace, glancing away from Gwen to hide the sheen on his eyes. “I have no idea if she hears me, but I still speak to her. It helps me to think that she hears me.”

Gwen watched him for a moment, her own eyes swimming. “She does,” she said softly. “My mother used to promise me that if the cancer took her away, she would always be with me. One way or another, I think she is.” She tipped her head, biting her lip. “An oncology nurse, maybe.”

“A beautiful way to honor your mother’s memory,” he agreed. “Thank you, Gwen.”

“Good luck in your new career,” she said, opening the door. “They’re lucky to have you. Goodbye, Dr. Lecter.”

She was his final patient in his practice. He sat at his desk, flicking through his appointment planner to find referrals for his new patients when there was a metal clang from something falling from the pages.

The dime on the floor made him swallow thickly, as he’d completely forgotten about it. The dime that Mischa used to practice moving things for Will.

He held it in his palm, tears making his vision blurry while he gathered himself up. He pressed the dime into his wallet, keeping it in an empty plastic slot for credit cards. This way, he’d have a little something of her with him all the time.

Consulting for the FBI ended up becoming a bit of a passion for him. Going to crime scenes soothed an ache in him that he could not verbalize with anyone. It took the edge off, which was something that grown sharper with Mischa’s absence.

It also put him around Will when his beloved needed him most, which was the best part about it. He had considered returning to surgery, but… it would take up a lot of his time. He would not be able to leave for weeks at a time when Will was away for cases. For his love, he would do anything.

The work was rewarding, none-the-less. He guest lectured at Quantico occasionally because there were a few openings that they hadn’t found anyone to fill.

He considered taking one of them, but… he loved his free time. Mischa had been right. With the extra time he had during his day, he stayed busy, but not overwhelmed.

There was plenty of time for Will, which was possibly the most rewarding thing about his newfound freedom.

He still missed Mischa dearly. It always felt like at any moment she would pop back over from the Middle Place, giving him grief for being a bore.

He had stayed with Will for two weeks after she left him. It was not something that made him proud, as he'd never liked to be considered clingy or needy with anyone before Will.

He went home for the first time since she left him, determined to be self-sufficient enough to deal with his loss. Will protested it, saying that he wanted Hannibal with him, and that he was more than welcomed to stay at his house.

He truly should have stayed.

The dining chair was still pulled out from her moving it back a few feet. The audiobook she had been listening to was still loaded up and waiting for her to press play to continue. His DVR was storing episodes of 'Game of Thrones' that he could not bring himself to watch or delete.

All her favorite DVDs were stored in the living room closet. They ranged from superhero movies to dinosaur movies. None of which he cared to watch if she was not with him.

He slept with his bedroom door open for the first time in thirty years that night. Guilt was choking him, as all he ever wanted was a bit of privacy from her from time to time. He wished he could take it back and have her with him as much as she wanted to be, but teacups did not come back together.

What was lost stayed lost. He curled up in his bed, mourning the quiet of his home with tears wetting his pillow. Just as he was about to climb from the bed because sleep was not coming to him, his doorbell rang.

It was late, so the sound surprised him while he climbed from the bed, sweeping tears from his cheeks.

He went to the door in a robe, cracking it open to find Will standing there wringing his hands. "You shouldn't be alone," he said softly. "I know it's clingy, but… I couldn't stand the thought of you alone in this house tonight. I know you said you'd be fine, but-"

Hannibal swung the door open, snatching Will by the lapels of his coat to drag him in for a crushing embrace. "I needed you," he said brokenly, holding Will tight. Will held him back just as fiercely, stroking his fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck. "I don't know how you knew, but I needed you."

"I knew because I know you," he replied, pressing a kiss against Hannibal's throat. Will kicked the door shut behind them to keep the cold out, never leaving the circle of Hannibal's arms for a moment. "I have you, Hannibal. I have you."

He let himself fall apart. He let Will hold him together.

He and Will sold their houses in late November, buying a new home together along Wolf Trap Creek. Hannibal loved the house because it was fully updated with a chef kitchen that he'd only ever dreamed of having, and Will liked it because it was a stone's throw from his favorite place on earth. Their closest neighbor was almost two miles down the road, which suited the both of them just fine. Their property was surrounded by wide open fields, sparkling water, and endless trees for as far as the eye could see.

Living with Will felt like the kind of perfection he'd never dreamed of having in his life. His partner was considerate and neat. He was spontaneous and funny, but more than anything else, he was the love of Hannibal's life.

Their master bedroom faced the back of the house, and it boasted a large deck that faced the woods and sky, and nothing else. Their dogs seemed to love the house as well, as there was plenty of room, inside and out, for them to roam.

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Nights like this were Hannibal's favorite. They had a cozy fire going in the master bedroom, making the room almost as hot as their lovemaking. Will had him on his stomach, knees spread wide against the bed while his partner licked into him, the pleasure so intense that his muscles quivered. "More," he pleaded, fisting the fabric of their comforter. "Will, please."

Will huffed a laugh against his rim, giving the muscle a last deep kiss. "I could fucking bite you, you're that gorgeous," he sighed. "Face me. I want to look at you."

He rolled over, smiling up at his beautiful man with a flushed face. Will's wet fingers slipped inside of him, stretching him open a bit. Neither of them needed much stretching anymore, not with the frequency of their lovemaking.

Will latched onto his nipple while working him open, biting the skin between blunt teeth. Hannibal moaned, arching his back as Will withdrew his fingers, slicking his cock quickly before pressing inside of him. "God, you feel good," Will sighed, fucking into him slowly enough that Hannibal's toes curled.

Everything Will did made him glance off his prostate, and it was immensely difficult to think, let alone speak. "Perfect," he managed breathlessly. "You're perfect."

Will smiled, leaning over him while pressing himself deep. He loved when Will did this, pressing himself as far as he could as though he wanted to shove his entire body inside of Hannibal. He grasped the flesh of Will's ass, rolling his hips up to grind him deeper. "Jesus fuck," Will gasped, biting a kiss against Hannibal's lips. "Love you," he said, nuzzling into Hannibal's jaw. "God, do I love you."

Hannibal regrettably let go of his lush ass to hold his perfect face, cradling it in his hands to kiss him as deeply as Will was fucking him. His cock was trapped between them, crushed between their sweaty stomachs and sending heated pleasure through his gut.

Will's pace increased, their wet skin slapping with each rough thrust of his hips. Their hot breath ghosted across one another's faces, each licking into one another's mouths when the mood struck.

They tumbled over the edge together, Hannibal cradling him in his arms while pressing thankful kisses to the side of his temple.
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Christmas was difficult for him, as he'd never spent a single one without Mischa in his entire life. He and Will decorated a tree all the same, and he winced as he came across her stocking in the box. Will took it from his numb fingers, holding it while biting his bottom lip. "She's still with us," he said softly. "I think we should put it up."

Hannibal nodded, watching Will hang it on the mantle. Their entire family had stockings, which took up the entire mantle to the point where it looked ridiculous. Three red stockings; Hannibal, Will, and Mischa. Seven green stockings; Max, Winston, Harley, Buster, Jack, Ellie, and Zoe.

It looked silly. It looked absolutely perfect. He and Will stood in their living room with their twinkling Christmas tree, looking at the hearth with watery eyes. He pulled Will in for a kiss, smiling when it tasted like hot chocolate.

"This is incredible," Will said softly, wincing as his voice echoed throughout the chapel. Hannibal grinned, pressing a kiss to his curls.

"There's no one here to offend," Hannibal pointed out. Their trip to Italy had been perfect so far, and he thought for certain that Will loved it just as much as he did. The county was ripe with history, which Will seemed to love more than anything else.

The chapel though. That was always Hannibal's favorite.

They walked through the old church, taking in every detail to the best of their ability. There was so very much to look at that it was almost impossible to notice all of it.

It was also impossible to take his eyes away from Will, whose beauty easily exceeded that of the church by a mile. The thing in his pocket suddenly weighed a thousand pounds, and he couldn't take it anymore.

Will was standing by the candles, lighting one for Mischa, he was certain. His blue button-down matched his ever-changing eyes perfectly today. Hannibal went to him, lacing their fingers together. "You know how dearly I love you, don't you?" he asked lowly.

"I can feel it," Will answered, turning his eyes away from the mosaics to look up at Hannibal. He still stole Hannibal's breath every time they made eye contact. "I never doubt it for a minute."

He withdrew the box from his pocket, raising Will's hand to press the velvet into his palm. "Marry me," he said softly, opening the box to reveal their platinum bands. Will's mouth fell open, his eyes snapping up to Hannibal in disbelief.

"You're *kidding* me with this?" he asked, a sharp laugh bubbling out of him.

Hannibal felt the walls falling down around him, the earth swallowing him whole. Strong hands gripped his shoulders, and Will shook his head. “Fuck, no. Wait. That’s… God that sounds so condescending. Look,” he said, reaching into his own pocket.

He procured a small box, the black leather of it completely nondescript. Hannibal blinked in surprise as Will opened it, laughing. Two rose gold bands sat nestled inside, each beautifully flawless. The warm color of them was absolutely stunning. “I was going to ask *you*,” Will explained, blushing madly. “When we got to the altar, I was going to drop down on one knee and beg you to never leave me. It’s good you did it this way, you don’t have to see me cry and beg like a desperate moron.”

Hannibal laughed, tugging his beloved man close so he could kiss him. Before their lips met, he hesitated. “Is that a yes?”

“Yes,” Will laughed, pressing his mouth against Hannibal’s eagerly. Hannibal gripped both boxes in his hand, holding onto Will for dear life with his other. He pressed the boxes into his pocket, lifting Will from the ground while kissing him like he would die if their mouths parted.

Will laughed, his arms coming around Hannibal’s neck to hold him close.

Hannibal spoke to Will about the urges he felt sometimes. The ugly, disfigured, monster that lived in him, that sometimes wanted blood. He told Will about how he wished he could have slaughtered the men that broke into his home and took everything he loved from him. He told him that sometimes even people he met in day-to-day life made him feel like splitting them open from stem to stern.

Will took everything he admitted in stride, barely flinching at his confession. “Have you ever acted on it?” he asked.

“Never,” he said softly, holding Will’s hands between his own. “I couldn’t… I cannot hurt Mischa. I couldn’t hurt you, either.”

Will took in a breath, looking away from him with glassy eyes. “Have I ever told you about the case that I worked on? The Vigilante?” Hannibal shook his head while Will raised Hannibal’s fingers for a kiss. “We had a serial killer who only killed rapists, murderers, and child molesters,” he recalled, swallowing thickly. “I went to those scenes, and… I felt *relief* that the vigilante had killed them. The people he removed from the world did not make it a better place. Everywhere they went, they caused pain and anguish. I reveled in it when I would relive his crime scenes. It felt… good. It felt *just*. We caught him eventually, an ex-DA that was sick of bad men getting back out in the world because of fucked up search warrants or bullshit alibis. It felt… like the opposite of justice to put him away. I… envied him, Hannibal.
“The difference for you and I is that we know that there is something after this life. We know it for a fact, don’t we?” he asked.

Hannibal nodded, thinking of his sister. Of how he may potentially ruin any chance of seeing her again if he… acted on his feelings. “It changes my perspective on acting out my fantasies.”

Will nodded, leaning forward on the porch step to press a kiss against his mouth. “It changes things because we *know* life goes on, but we don’t know if our actions in this world affect our next. I want this life with you, and I want my next life with you, too. I want to meet your family when we leave this world with a clear conscience. I want to hug Mischa and tell her that we were good men who lived our lives as meaningfully as we could, urges and fantasies aside.”

“I want that, too,” he said gruffly, shaking his head in disbelief. “I love you, Will Graham. I have no idea what I’ve done to deserve you.”

“Something truly horrible, no doubt,” he teased, tipping Hannibal’s face up for a kiss even though he was smiling. “Talk to me when you’re feeling… those urges. Share with me. We’ll go to the shooting range, and you can… I don’t know, take it out on a target. Kill that piece of paper for all it’s worth.”

Hannibal nodded, folding into Will’s embrace, allowing his warmth to settle into his ice-cold bones. He was certain Will would leave him for this, but he wouldn’t. Will was still here. Still holding him. Still keeping him together even as he wanted to fall apart.

Will was like him. He understood Hannibal and his urges completely. They would keep one another honest, because he wanted forever with Will, too.

Their wedding was a very, very, small affair. It was just the two of them, Jack Crawford and his wife Bella, a few colleagues from their work that they’d grown to like, and their dogs. They got married in their backyard, the summer wind ruffling through the trees and stirring the scent of flowers through the air.

Hannibal had their wedding bands combined. The platinum and rose gold bands were melted down, woven together so the metal looped around in a silver and gold rope. It was perfectly them in every way. The cold, platinum metal that sometimes matched Hannibal’s disposition was forever entwined with the warm rose gold that encompassed the incredibly sweet warmth of Will’s personality. The metals were beautiful together, just like he and Will were.

They shared their first dance as a married couple. A waltz, which reminded Hannibal of that night nearly a year ago when he’d dragged Will around his kitchen. He pressed a smile against his husband’s throat, inhaling the scent of him into his lungs. “Your sister wants me to tell you,” Will said softly, making the hairs on his arms stand on end. “That your suit is ridiculous, and that you’re a snob,” he laughed, “and that she loves you more than anything. She’s proud of you.”

He hid his tears in Will’s neck, smiling through a watery laugh. “Thank you, beloved,” he sighed. “I love you so dearly.”

“Anything, Hannibal,” Will promised, taking the lead in their first dance. “Anything.”

“You’ve got no bait on your line,” Will laughed.

Early morning sunshine filtered through the trees, casting his husband in shimmering, golden, light. There were times over the last ten years where he was certain Will was drinking from a fountain of youth without him knowing it.

He hadn’t aged a day. He was still as beautiful now as he was when they’d met.

Will stood to his side in their stream, working another worm onto the hook. “You’ve got to thread him through, like this,” he said, brilliant green eyes fixed firmly on his task. “I know you know this,” he grinned, tossing an exasperated look at Hannibal. “I’ve showed you almost every time we come fishing. For *ten years*.”

“Perhaps I’m looking for a way to make you come over to me,” Hannibal smiled, leaning in for a kiss that Will gave him, despite his rolling eyes.

“Well, mission accomplished,” he teased, squinting up into the sunlight to press another kiss against Hannibal’s cheek. “Now help me catch us some dinner, please.”

Will waded off in the water, adorable even in rubber waders. They spent a lot of time out here through their marriage. It had become somewhat of a safe haven for them. A place where they could unwind from the pressures of their careers as well as a place where they could reconnect.

Hannibal had never been what some people consider to be ‘outdoorsy.’ He liked quiet evenings with his harpsichord. He loved sipping a drink by the hearth, content and warm in Will’s company while surrounded by their dogs, of which there were ten, now.

This stream held a special place in his heart, though. It was where he spent his last evening with Mischa. It was where he and Will spent most of their weekends. It was where his beloved husband came to life before his eyes.

In the summertime, it was possibly the most peaceful place on earth. The air was so clean out this far away from the city. The birch trees that lined the stream gave them plenty of shade. Sometimes he attempted to fish, sometimes he sat by the side of the stream and sketched Will while he fished.

Sometimes, like today, all he wanted was to crush Will in his arms and snuggle him in the shade.

Recasting his line into the water, his eyes drifted over to where Will was standing. Eyes the color of summer leaves kept drifting over to him discretely, a shy smile on his husband’s lips. “See something you like?” he teased.

“I see something I love,” he corrected, pursing his lips when his line tangled in something.

Will sighed, reeling himself in before heading over to where Hannibal’s line was tangled in branches and rocks. He cut the line free, gesturing for Hannibal to reel it in while returning to his side. “You’re not in the mood to fish, huh?”

“Well,” Hannibal said, blushing in the early morning heat. “I am, but…”

“C’mon,” Will sighed, tossing a teasing smile over his shoulder. “Take your rubber pants off, then.”

This. This was what Hannibal hoped his afterlife would be. He sat under a birch tree in the soft grass, his husband straddling his hips. Gentle fingers tipped his face up while petal soft lips pressed against his own. A sweet tongue licked into his mouth, Will’s lithe body rocking against him, though the feeling was muted because of his thick cargo shorts.

He was shirtless, at least. Soft, sweat damp, skin pressed flush against his own chest.

“Better?” Will laughed, his minty curls blowing wild in the wind.

“Much,” he grinned, hauling Will closer against his body.

They were on a bit of a vacation for their ten-year anniversary. There was talk of going back to Italy for it, but… both thought staying home with their dogs was a better way to spend their time.

With his lap full of Will, he couldn’t find any complaint.

“I thought marriage was supposed to relax after a while,” Will said, tipping Hannibal’s head back so he could press kisses along the line of his throat. “I thought people got bored with each other, eventually.”

“You could never bore me,” Hannibal said softly, lacing his fingers through thick curls. “One does not grow bored with living miracles.”

Will’s eyes fluttered shut, a smile stretching his lips. “One avoids being boring by avoiding speaking of oneself in the third person,” he said, laughing wickedly.

Hannibal went still, his mouth falling open. It had been years since she’d stopped in for a visit. Hearing her words from all those years ago made his gut clench. “Noted,” he said softly.

“Will she ever stop in to say something sweet?” Will asked, cracking his eyes back open. Hannibal loved him all the more when he saw how glassy they were. “Is that not a possibility for her?”

“Her affection always came with a side of tart,” he said through a watery laugh. Will swiped his tears away, kissing the damp skin on his cheek. “She’s like lemonade, I suppose.”

“I miss her,” Will croaked, shaking his head as if he were embarrassed to show Hannibal how much her absence affected him.

“As do I,” Hannibal admitted, changing the atmosphere they’d created by hugging Will gently. “She brought me to you, though. I can’t regret anything that’s happened because I have you. We’ll see her again, you know.”

“You think in the next life, we’ll still love each other like this?” Will asked, gentle fingers carding through his chest hair to rest over his beating heart.

“I think,” Hannibal said softly, dragging his fingers down the hot skin of Will’s back. “I think we’ll be so unbearably insufferable that we’ll get our own wing in the afterlife. Somewhere we can do this for decades without disgusting the people around us.”

Will laughed, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Hannibal’s with his eyes closed. “*Decades*? I was thinking more like forever.”

Hannibal pressed a kiss against his lips, holding him close. “Forever,” he agreed.

Chapter End Notes

The response to last chapter has been so overwhelmingly kind. I adore every single one of you. One more chapter will go up tomorrow morning (in a few hours, really.) It's short and sweet.

Thank you guys so much. <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They were *much*. I used to say that even when I was a ghost living under my brother's roof. Tethered to his side like a prison ball, dragging around behind him wherever he went.

It's gotten risky to peek in on them. Their love for one another is… well, *much*.

I miss Hannibal every day. Mama tells me that it doesn't really get better, either. She's missed me and Hannibal for thirty years. Spending time with her has been a blessing. Being able to hug her is like a miracle.

You don't even realize how torturous it can be to go so long without touching another person. I'm not even talking about sexy times. Not that I know anything about sexy times, yet. I say *yet*, because there's a hot guy on the other side that has caught my eye. Even though he was vegan when he was breathing. That kind of thing doesn't matter too much, here.

Papa has always been an aloof man. He never bothered with me or Han much when we were kids. He loves us, but not in that bone-crushing way that my Mom loves us. Being an Italian, she can be affectionate. Her love for us always came with big hugs and kisses pressed to each cheek until I'd giggle madly in the circle of her arms.

I'm glad Han and I take after her for that.

I've been in my brother's life for as long as I can remember. Not a single day has drifted past without speaking to him, unless I was absconded to the Middle Place because I moved something that I shouldn't have.

Watching his life continue without me is bittersweet. Will is an absolute treasure, and while I'm so happy that he's found someone that brings him joy…

I wish I were there to share it with them.

My brother danced like a fool at his wedding. He likes to show off. Always has. Poor Will was swept up in it, lead around the dance floor with a goofy smile on his face. Of course, Han's suit was snowball white from head to toe. He's always been a diva whether he wants to admit it or not.

When Han and I were kids, he was always well put together, too. He'd spend an hour at the bathroom mirror, futzing with his hair while straightening his little blazers. He looked so much like our dad, even then.

Even when he had to use a footstool to see himself over the bathroom counter.

He pretends he's cold and uncaring, but I know better than most. Well, I used to know better than most, anyway. Will knows him now, too. My brother-in-law. God, do I love him.

I remember nothing from my childhood so much as I remember my brother. He was always there. Always with me. His stern little face would light up when we were playing in the yard, and even when I was too little to understand much, I understood how momentous that was.

Something that not a lot of people know about him is that he used to be so damned *small*. It wasn't until he hit puberty that he shot up nine inches, towering over other people like a thin little tree. He's thinner than people think he is. Like a bird with its feathers fluffed up in defense of itself, his suits pad him and make him broader than he is.

He's still my little storm cloud.

I know he misses me. He speaks to me daily, even though Will isn't always around to hear him. I respond sometimes when he talks, even though he can't hear me, either.

Sometimes it's a small plea, like, 'Mischa, give me strength.'

Idiots like to test his patience sometimes, never quite realizing how frayed and thin his resolve and restraint are at any given moment. I don't need to fortify him, though. He's stronger than he could ever realize.

Staying with him after I passed showed me just how difficult it is for him to contain that darkness in him. Sometimes we'd be out somewhere, and someone would say or do something that, yeah, was pretty damned rude. Most people would just huff in annoyance or roll their eyes, but not my brother. He'd watch them like a velociraptor watches their prey move through the woods. Narrowed eyes, tense muscles, and quiet menace.

When he'd get like that, I would sing to him or tell him a really stupid joke. 'Hey Hannibal,' I said one time when he was staring at a super rude waiter. 'Two muffins are sitting in an oven. One muffin goes, 'Man, it's hot in here!' The other muffin says, 'Oh my God! A talking muffin!'

His narrowed eyes blinked, the tension going out of him like a sail that had lost wind. "Where on Earth do you find these jokes?" he snorted under his breath.

Just like that, he was back with me.

Even when he was a tiny scrap of a boy, he'd puff up like a ruffled bird if anyone got too close to me. He protected me fiercely, throwing himself in the line of fire any time someone talked to me the wrong way. Or at least, the wrong way according to Hannibal.

That included our father, by the way.

The two of us spent a lot of time grounded for one thing or another. We'd take off into the woods without telling anyone more times than I can count. It would worry our mother to tears, and in turn, piss off our dad. When we eventually came home, he'd be standing at the foot of the stairs leading into the house, his hands on his hips. The hands on the hips thing was a sign. We were in trouble.

Hannibal would stand between me and our dad, his own little hands on his hips, glaring up at him in defiance. When we were punished, he'd sneak out of his room to come to mine, soothing me with toys or candy. He was and is the best big brother ever. I've always known that.

He's stayed a good man, too. I don't know if it's Will's doing or if it's still me, really. The aura around them is still golden, which means that when they leave that world, they're still coming to me. I was worried that the moment I left, Hannibal would embrace that darkness in him once and for all.

He hasn't. He's fought it every step of the way.

Han's always been the kind of guy that would happily never step on anything other than wood floors or tile for the duration of his life. Nature just doesn't call to him like it calls to me. He always went when I asked, though.

He always goes when Will asks, too.

Will is a lot like me in a lot of ways. He loves being outside. He loves animals. He loves my brother more than anything in this world.

He loves Game of Thrones, and when he talks to me, he tells me that I apparently didn't miss anything much. Daenerys deserved better, damn you all.

I've drifted, here. Sorry.

All I'm trying to say is that I miss them dearly, but every day brings me closer to being with them again. Not that I want them to die, obviously. I just can't wait to hug them and feel them like real people feel one another. I can't wait to take Will into the woods here. I've been collecting all of their dogs as they cross over, and I love every single one of them just as hard as Will's ever loved them.

I've had Winston with me for close to fifteen years now, and he itches to see Will again. I know he does.

He and Hannibal have had a beautiful life together. I've watched the decades pass by, drifting like seasons. Their love hasn't changed in all that time. It's still beautiful and honest. My brother has been a very, very, good husband. Which is good, because Will is absolutely perfect.

I sometimes wish they'd make friends with other people, but… if anyone knows how possessive my brother can be, it's me. Will is his and his alone, and in his mind, they don't need anyone else but one another.

When they get here, he's going to have to suck it up. Will and I have some catching up to do.

Mama loves him fiercely. I almost died again when she first saw me. We hugged and cried, completely overwhelmed by how much we missed one another. Then she turns to look back at Will and Hannibal, and she goes, "How did your brother get such a *pretty* boy?"

I can’t wait to tell him that one. God, he’s going to be so offended.

If I’d have known how little time I had left with them, I wouldn’t have exercised my ghost muscles so much. Everything happens for a reason, and because I went nuclear in front of Will’s boss, his job ended up being much easier for him. The people around him looked at him with respect. Jack got him whatever he needed, whenever he needed it. It just sucks sometimes that I spent so much time in the Middle Place because I didn’t know how much time I had left with them.

That’s the thing about life, though. You don’t know how much time you have. You’re not promised anything more than the breath that you’re currently exhaling from your lungs. Your loved ones aren’t promised anything more than that, either.

Love one another with all you got. Squeeze your Mom. Hug your frigid ass brother. Tell that cute vegan that caught your eye that you think his jawline was cut by a diamond. Be loud and happy and exactly who you want to be. Well, if who you want to be is quiet and solemn, then exit stage left where Hannibal spends his time brooding. Do whatever makes you happy.

The point is, live like today is your last day. Be honest with your loved ones. Hug them. And if there comes a point where you can’t do that anymore because you have left them, or they’ve left you, then know that life goes on. Like the Great Jeff Goldblum once said, ‘Life finds a way.’

Your loved ones are still with you in much the same way that I am still with Hannibal and Will. I will see them again, sooner rather than later.

Until I do, I’ll be waiting for them and watching. Through the looking glass.

Chapter End Notes

I decided to edit it and get it out! haha.

Thank you all so much for every kind word and kudos. It's so very, very, appreciated!

I'm STILL struggling with the a/b/o story for these two, so you won't be without a story from me for long! <3333333

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!